



Winter Hazards FAQs

On average, a major winter storm hits part of Michigan at least once per month between October and April. Since 1970, more than 50 persons have died as a direct result of severe winter weather. This is in addition to victims of auto accidents due to slippery roads and those who suffer heart attacks while shoveling snow. The following are frequently asked questions about winter weather.

1. What is wind chill?

Wind chill is the perceived temperature resulting from the effect of wind, in combination with cold air, which increases the rate of heat loss from the human body.

2. What is frostbite and what can you do to treat it?

Frostbite is damage to body tissue caused by that tissue being frozen. Frostbite causes a loss of feeling and a white or pale appearance in extremities, such as fingers, toes, ear lobes, or the tip of the nose. Frostbite varies in severity from frostnip to deep frostbite, depending on the length of exposure, temperature to which the skin is exposed and wind speed. For frostnip, place firm, steady pressure from a warm hand against the area. Also, blow on the surface holding the frostnipped area against the body. Do not rub the area, apply snow or plunge it into very hot or cold water. Victims of severe frostbite must receive prompt medical attention.

3. What is hypothermia and what are the warning signs?

Hypothermia occurs when the body temperature drops to 95 degrees F. or lower. It can develop whenever body heat loss exceeds heat gain. Hypothermia is not exclusive to winter. It can occur during the wind and rain of spring and summer. Hypothermia is often mistaken for fatigue, irritability, or dehydration and may include some of these signs: abnormal decision making; improper response to cold; apathy, lethargy; decreased cooperation; slurred speech; disorientation; shivering; stumbling; and stiffness progressing to inability to move.

4. How do you treat hypothermia?

Mild to moderate hypothermia (body temperature greater than 90 degreeF., conscious, shivering, able to walk)

- Prevent further heat loss. Dry, remove from cold and insulate.
- Rewarm by warming the body core first. Rehydrate with warm broth.
- Seek medical attention.

Severe hypothermia (body temperature less than 90 degree F., unconscious, not shivering)

- Evacuate to rewarm.
- Prevent further heat loss.
- Seek immediate medical attention.

5. What are the various winter weather warnings and advisories?

- A **winter storm watch** indicates that severe winter weather conditions may affect your area.
- A **winter storm warning** indicates that severe winter conditions are imminent.
- A **winter storm warning** for heavy snow indicates snowfalls of at least 6 inches in 12 hours or 8 inches in a 24-hour period are expected. In the Upper Peninsula, it indicates 8 or more inches in 12 hours and 10 or more inches in a 24-hour period.
- **Blizzard warnings** are issued when sustained wind speeds or frequent gusts of at least 35 miles per hour are accompanied by considerable falling and/or blowing snow. Visibility is greatly reduced during a blizzard.
- **Snow advisories** are issued when snowfalls of 4 to 5 inches are expected in a 12-hour period for the average of the forecast range. In the Upper Peninsula, it would result when 4 to 7 inches of snow are anticipated in that same time period.