

Boy, howdy! Is it cold outside! How cold is it? Why it is so cold that when I turned the shower on this morning I got hail! It is so cold that Rita and I stopped eating with metal cutlery because we saw people walking around with spoons and forks stuck to their tongues! Today, it was so cold that I chipped a tooth while eating soup!

Okay, perhaps I am stretching it a bit. The fact remains there is little humor when dealing with extreme cold conditions. One might recall that on December 21, 2017, winter officially began. On that very day, our balmy autumn weather immediately disappeared and along came snow and cold, both which have been with us for the past two weeks. Even now, after the arrival of the New Year, major relief from the freezing cold does not look promising. What's a person to do?

Although gardening and yardwork are officially over for the season, there are still many reasons we find ourselves outdoors. With such extreme cold currently occurring, I urge each of us to be mindful.

First, pay close attention to the weather forecast. Try to avoid being outdoors in sub-zero temperatures, if possible; but if unavoidable, take necessary precautions. At all costs, avoid hypothermia and/or frostbite. Either can occur quickly.

Hypothermia is a medical emergency caused by exposure to cold. It occurs when our body loses heat faster than it produces heat, triggering a dangerously low body temperature. Most everyone knows normal body temperature is around 98.6° F or 37°C. Hypothermia occurs when body temperature falls below 95° F or 35° C. When this occurs, the heart, nervous system and other organs cannot work normally. Left untreated, hypothermia can eventually lead to complete failure of the heart and respiratory system and eventually cause death.

Signs and symptoms of hypothermia include the following:

- Excessive shivering
- Slurred speech or mumbling
- Slow, shallow breathing
- Weak pulse

- Clumsiness or lack of coordination
- Drowsiness or very low energy
- Confusion or memory loss
- Loss of consciousness

Of late, actual outdoor temperatures have fallen well below zero, and they alone are dangerous; however, those temperatures are not all that matters. Pay attention to the wind chill temperatures. Wind chill makes us feel colder in winter than the actual air temperature. This is due to the interaction of air temperature and wind on the human body. Both temperature and wind cause quicker heat loss from our body surfaces.

Frostbite is an injury caused by freezing of the skin and underlying tissues. The tip of the nose, fingers, toes, and ear lobes are the areas on the body most susceptible to frostbite. First, the skin becomes very cold and red, then numb, hard and pale. Frostbite can even occur on skin covered by gloves or other clothing. Frostnip, the first stage of frostbite, does not cause permanent skin damage. One can treat very mild frostbite with first-aid measures, including rewarming the skin. Serious frostbite can damage skin tissue, muscles and bones. Possible complications of severe frostbite include infection and nerve damage.

Anyone showing signs of hypothermia or frostbite should seek medical attention immediately.

As I stated earlier, it is no joking matter when one is exposed to extremely cold temperatures. I urge everyone to take precautions. Be safe. Dress appropriately and, if possible, stay indoors.

Okay, I cannot resist — I leave you with one more joke. It was so cold yesterday morning that I opened the refrigerator door just to heat the house! 😊