

## Cold Weather Alert Guidelines For Child Care Centres

### Issuing a Cold Weather Alert

The Medical Officer of Health issues a Cold Weather Alert when one or more of the following criteria are met:

- Daily predicted low temperature of  $-15^{\circ}$  Celsius without wind chill; or
- Wind chill reaches the level at which Environment Canada issues a warning for outdoor activity for people in the Leeds, Grenville and Lanark area.
- Extreme weather conditions, such as blizzard or ice storm.

### Recommendations

1. Establish a policy and procedure to deal with potential consequences of extreme cold temperatures and winter storms (e.g. power outages, lack of transportation). An emergency kit should be readily available.
2. Plan to reduce the amount of time children spend outside when the temperature reaches  $-15^{\circ}$  Celsius or colder, with or without wind chill.  

Children should be kept indoors when the temperature reaches  $-25^{\circ}$  Celsius with or without wind chill. Some people are more susceptible to cold, particularly children, and some medications can increase a person's susceptibility to cold also. Parents should consult with their physician.
3. Ensure that children are dressed warmly, covering exposed skin: insulated boots, winter weight coats, mittens, hats and neck warmers.
4. Change wet clothing and footwear immediately (wet clothing chills the body rapidly).
5. Although it is unlikely that cold related injuries would occur during the day, all staff should be able to recognize and treat symptoms of frostbite and hypothermia. Make sure that children are given plenty of warm fluids to prevent dehydration.
6. Watch carefully for the following symptoms when children are playing outside:
  - Shivering
  - Discoloration of skin
  - Complaining of pain, numbness, burning or fatigue, confusion, slurring of speech
  - StiffnessMove the child indoors if any of the above symptoms occur.
7. Educate children in dealing with cold weather:
  - Drink plenty of fluids
  - Dress warmly
  - Recognize sign of injury due to the cold

# FACT SHEET

The Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit recommends that childcare providers recognize the sign of cold related injuries, and follow first aid treatments promptly.

In all cases, get the child to a warm place as soon as possible, remove wet clothing, and wrap child in a blanket if needed.

Signs of Injury Due to Cold	Treatment
<p><b>Frostnip:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A mild form of frostbite, where only the skin freezes</li> <li>• Skin appears yellowish or white, but feels soft to the touch</li> <li>• Painful tingling or burning sensation</li> </ul>	<p><b>What to do:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not rub or massage the area</li> <li>• Warm the area gradually – use body heat (a warm hand), or blow warm breath on the area, avoid direct heat which can burn the skin (e.g. hot water bottle or heating pad)</li> <li>• Once the area is warm, do not re-expose it to the cold</li> </ul>
<p><b>Frostbite:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A more severe condition, where both the skin and the underlying tissue (fat, muscle and bone) are frozen</li> <li>• Skin appears white and waxy, and is hard to touch</li> <li>• No sensation, the area is numb</li> </ul>	<p><b>What to do:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Frostbite can be serious – get medical attention</li> <li>• Do not rub or massage the area</li> <li>• Warm the area gradually – use body heat, or blow warm breath on the area, avoid direct heat which can burn the skin (e.g. hot water bottle, heating pad)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Hypothermia:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling cold over a prolonged period of time can cause a drop in body temperature (below the normal 37°C)</li> <li>• Shivering, confusion and slurring of speech</li> <li>• Can progress to loss of consciousness</li> </ul> <p><b>Additional information:</b></p> <p><b>Health Canada</b>  <a href="http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/environ/cold-extreme-froid-eng.php">http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/environ/cold-extreme-froid-eng.php</a></p>	<p><b>What to do:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call 911, this is an emergency</li> <li>• While waiting for help, bring child indoors, remove wet clothing</li> <li>• Body heat can warm child’s temperature slowly, along with warm dry clothing and blankets.</li> <li>• Offer warm water, juice or milk</li> <li>• Do not offer hot drinks</li> <li>• Do not use hot water bottles, or heating pads</li> <li>• Do not rub the area</li> </ul>

**Reference:** Adapted with permission from the Middlesex London Health Unit



For more information, please call the Health ACTION Line at **1-800-660-5853** or visit our website at [www.healthunit.org](http://www.healthunit.org)