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# **Emergency Preparedness Pointers**

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## **Frostbite Prevention and Care**

October brought the first freeze of the upcoming winter season and warnings were issued by the weather service to protect delicate plants and crops from the nighttime temperatures. Freezing temperatures can be a threat to plants and people alike. Soon those freezing temperatures will occur during the daytime when many people will be working or recreating outdoors. Exposure to these conditions can lead to frostbite. Frostbite can be a serious medical condition if not treated correctly; more importantly, it is a preventable condition when the proper steps are taken to prepare for outdoor activities in cold weather.



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### **Keep The Cold Out**

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Dressing properly can prevent or reduce the risk of frostbite. Keeping the body along with extremities warm is vital; hands, feet, nose and ears all need to be protected. It is best to bundle up in layered, loose fitting clothes. Ski masks, hat and scarf, warm socks and mittens (more so than gloves) will help keep the cold out. However, wet clothes or damp skin can increase the risk of frostbite, so it is important to get indoors to dry out and warm up once these conditions occur.

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### **Cold Weather Activity Tips**

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- If you are new to the area and have come from a warmer climate, give your body time to adjust before spending long periods of time outdoors.
- Consult with local authorities first about weather, terrain and avalanche conditions when planning outdoor activities.
- Avoid activities/situations that may be beyond your experience or training in cold weather conditions.
- Avoid drinking alcohol either before or during exposure to cold weather. It may keep you from realizing your body is becoming too cold.
- Avoid cigarette smoking. It can negatively affect circulation and increase the risk of frostbite.
- At the first sign of discoloration (redness, blueness or whiteness) or pain in your skin, get out of the cold, warm up and protect the exposed skin.

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### **+ Frostbite Symptoms and Care +**

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Frostbite occurs when the skin and the tissues beneath it freeze. Hands, feet nose and ears are the most likely parts of the body to be affected by frostbite. Symptoms of frostbite may include:

- ① Skin appears white, or greyish-yellow, is very cold and has a hard or waxy feel
- ② Skin may itch, burn or feel numb.

When any of these conditions exist, a person should immediately seek shelter indoors. While outdoors it is very important to protect the skin from further exposure. Cover face, ears or nose with dry gloved hands. If hands are affected, place them under the armpits. If possible, do not walk on frostbitten feet or toes as it causes further damage. Once the affected person is inside they should remove all wet clothes.

The key to treating frostbite is to gradually warm the affected area. Place frostbitten hands or feet in warm water (104°—107° F). Cover or wrap other areas in a warm blanket. To avoid burns or other damage do not use direct heat like a stove, fireplace, heat lamp or heating pad. If there is any chance the affected area may freeze again before a constant shelter source (home, hospital etc.) is found, do not thaw it.

As the skin thaws, it may turn red and have a burning sensation. This is a sign that circulation is returning. If numbness or sustained pain continue during the warming, if blisters develop or if skin is darkened or black, seek medical attention immediately. This is severe frostbite and requires professional medical care.

