

Be aware of cold-related illnesses as temperatures drop

Written by gallupsun
Thursday, 30 November 2023 20:37

The New Mexico Department of Health reminds residents low temperatures experienced in some parts of the state today will continue off and on throughout the winter season, and everyone should be aware of the risks of cold-related illness.

Like extreme heat, extreme cold temperatures can be dangerous and can lead to health emergencies for anyone. Respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, high blood pressure, diabetes, arthritis, and vascular diseases are among the most common conditions that put anyone at increased medical risk.

Age, living and working conditions also play a role in potential dangers of extreme weather conditions including infants, older adults, people who use alcohol or drugs, those who are unhoused, outdoor workers, and those who live or work in areas that are poorly insulated and/or without heat.

Cold-related illnesses happen when people are exposed to extreme cold and can be serious when the body begins to lose heat faster than it is produced. Prolonged exposure to cold eventually uses up the body's stored energy, resulting in hypothermia.

Symptoms vary depending on how long a person is exposed. The first symptoms to look out for are shivering, fatigue, loss of coordination, confusion and disorientation. A person with progressively worse symptoms may experience no shivering but instead blue skin, dilated pupils, slowed pulse and breathing, even loss of consciousness.

Additional health conditions that increase the risk of cold related illnesses are hypothyroidism (a condition causing slow metabolism), mental illness, Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's and dementia.

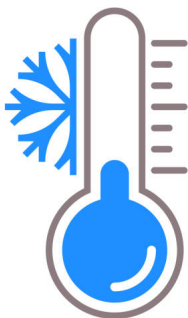
Health tips:

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- Dress for the weather. Wear multiple layers rather than fewer heavy layers. Wear a hat, gloves and boots. Wear wool or waterproof clothing when possible. Don't overexert yourself but keep yourself moving to circulate your blood flow. Stay dry. Water loses heat much faster than air.
- Stay indoors when possible. If you must go outdoors, dress warmly. Try to go outside during the warmest part of the day, between 10 am and 3 pm.
- Watch for symptoms of cold-related illness. Pay attention to shivering, confusion, exhaustion, numbness, tingling, slurred speech, color changes in the skin, and other symptoms. Seek medical attention if needed.
- Ensure that your home is heated safely and equipped for winter weather (thermometer, heating, smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, etc.) Find more information on preventing carbon monoxide poisoning at <https://nmtracking.doh.nm.gov/health/poisonings/CarbonMonoxidePoisoning.html>.
- Avoid alcohol and caffeine. Instead drink warm, hydrating beverages.
- Know that alcohol increases the rate at which heat leaves the body. Additionally, all psychoactive drugs can affect a person's ability to make decisions and keep themselves safe.
- Travel safely: Carry a first aid and emergency kit with you.
- Check on others, especially those in high-risk groups.
- Bring your pets inside and make sure that they have proper bedding to protect them from the cold - both inside and outside.



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