

Quick Tips for shelter providers/outreach staff for keeping people warm in cold weather and recognizing and dealing with hypothermia and frostbite.

Key Point: If you think someone may have hypothermia or frostbite they should be referred for medical evaluation.

General guidance

- Encourage staying inside as much as possible, especially for sleeping
- Remind clients about dressing in layers
- Provide/encourage a hat or head covering- this helps decrease heat loss tremendously
- Provide/encourage mittens (warmer than gloves) and scarves
- Encourage client to stay dry as possible-outer wear best if water resistant
- Proper foot wear is hard to get in Seattle; people will need boots/shoes and socks

Additional ways to help

- Provide clothing as above
- Provide high-energy foods such as energy bars
- Provide hearty soups and stews with high carbohydrate and protein
- Encourage hydration- limit coffee, provide teas, particularly decaf, water, warmed juices, broth
- Alcohol exacerbates heat loss. Does not "warm you up"
- Assist with drying feet, provide dry socks/shoes

Most people who come in from the cold will respond to the following

- Remove wet clothing
- Put on dry clothing
- Provide warm beverages, especially broth, warm Gatorade, juices (helps with restoring electrolytes and hydration)
- If people begin to develop any of the symptoms below they should be referred for medical evaluation

Hypothermia and Frostbite

People at higher risk for hypothermia include persons who:

- Spend a lot of time outside
- Are under-dressed for weather
- Dependent on alcohol
- Use recreational drug users
- Have diabetes
- Are elderly
- Are malnourished
- Are mentally ill
- Have an active infection
- Have mobility problems

The signs and symptoms of hypothermia are similar to those of intoxication:

- Confusion
- Slurred speech
- Trouble with coordination
- Slowed response time
- Sleepiness
- They are also likely to be shivering

Frostbite

- Frost bitten areas may look dusky, dark
- Immersion foot may look waxy, blanched, grayish /whitish
- May feel numb or prickly to the person.
- These conditions require quick medical evaluation.

If signs of either of these are present, these folks should be referred for medical evaluation

While they are waiting to be transferred provide:

- Warm, dry clothing/covering
- Warm, not hot, liquids
- Avoid direct exposure to heaters or attempts to rapidly warm the person up as this can make things worse.