

COLD WEATHER EXPOSURE – HOW TO PROTECT YOUR CHILD

Dear Parents/Guardians,

With the onset of cold weather, our children are at increased risk for health problems related to exposure to cold temperatures. It is critical that they are adequately clothed to prevent hypothermia (abnormally low body temperature) or frostbite. Please make sure when your child leaves home each school day that he/she is well protected from the cold. The following will help to prevent hypothermia or frostbite:

- Dress in layers;
- Make sure your child wears a heavy coat, warm gloves or mittens, hat, and scarf so that mouth, nose, and ears are covered. Children should be reminded to keep their coats zipped and gloves, hat, and scarf on while outside; and
- Avoid exposure to the wind.

Hypothermia – **What is it?** When exposed to cold temperatures, your body begins to lose heat faster than it can be produced. The result is hypothermia or abnormally low body temperature. Body temperature that is too low affects the brain, making the person unable to think clearly or move well. This makes hypothermia particularly dangerous because a person may not know it is happening and won't be able to do anything about it before it's too late. Hypothermia is most likely to occur at very cold temperatures but can occur even at cool temperatures, if a person becomes chilled from rain, sweat, or submersion in cold water.

- **Symptoms** – Shivering, exhaustion, confusion, fumbling hands, memory loss, slurred speech, and drowsiness. Infants might have bright red cold skin and very low energy.
- **Treatment** – If you notice any of these signs take the person's temperature. ***If it is below 95 degrees, the situation is an emergency – get medical attention immediately.*** If medical care is not available, do the following: Move the person to a warm area, remove any wet clothing, warm the body using an electric blanket if possible or use skin to skin contact under loose, dry layers of blankets, and have the person drink warm liquids. After the body temperature has increased, keep the person dry and wrapped in a warm blanket, including the head and neck. Get medical attention as soon as possible.

Frostbite – **What is it?** Frostbite is localized cold injury to a body part that may occur with or without hypothermia. Frostbite commonly affects specific body parts, such as the feet and toes or hands and fingers. In some instances tissue damage is so severe it may require amputation.

- **Symptoms** – At the first sign of redness or pain in any skin area, get out of the cold or protect exposed skin as frostbite may be beginning. Symptoms may include numbness, clumsiness, white or grayish-yellow skin area, or skin that feels unusually firm or waxy. ***A person is often unaware of frostbite until someone else points it out because the frozen tissues are numb.***
- **Treatment** – Seek medical attention immediately. If medical care is not available, do the following: Move the person to a warm area, immerse affected area in warm water (not hot water – temperature should be comfortable to unaffected parts of the body), and **do not massage the area, rub with snow, or use a heating pad, etc.** Affected areas are numb and can easily be burned. Seek medical care as soon as possible.

Remember to be alert to weather changes and your child's needs.

Our children are our future.