Frostbite: Prevention and Recognition \*

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What is Frostbite?

Exposure to cold temperature without adequate protection can result in frostbite. Frostbite means that a part of a body has been frozen and this can be quite dangerous. Usually it is the face, nose, ears, fingers and toes that get frostbitten. Frostbite can occur during any outdoor activity including play, and especially fast moving sports such as skating, skiing, snowboarding and tobogganing. Obviously the colder and windier it is, the quicker an unprotected body part or area will become frostbitten. The skin around a frost bitten area initially becomes red then pale and very rarely bluish. As the skin warms up there can be some blisters.

**Frostbite Prevention:**

* Individuals should be dressed warmly with properly fitting clothing. Several thin layers will help keep them dry as well as warm. Clothing should include long johns, turtlenecks, one or two shirts, pants, sweater, coat, warm socks, boots, gloves or mittens, and a hat.
* Do not let individuals stay out in the cold too long. Time limits depend on how cold it is. Call individual inside periodically to warm up.
* When possible, individuals who are particularly at risk (e.g. elderly, people with poor circulation, non-ambulatory status) should not go outdoors when it is colder than 32 F (or 4 degrees C).
* Use common sense: for example, if there is a cold or frostbite warning issued, do not let the individuals out outdoors at all. If they must go out, accompany them and ensure that they continue to wear the protective clothing (such as coat, hat, and gloves) throughout the time that they are outdoors.
* Make sure the individual’s clothing is dry. Change into dry clothing immediately as wet clothing can make frostbite occur quicker

**What Are The Signs of Frostbite?**   
  
The signs and symptoms of frostbite include:

* Numbness or pain in the fingers, toes, nose, cheeks or ears
* Skin may be blue, white and/or blotchy
* The skin is blistered, hard to the touch or shiny

**What Should be Done when Frostbite is Suspected** **?**

Remember that prevention of frostbite is the best approach; if there is a possibility of frostbite, take the following steps:

* Take the individual indoors immediately
* Ask the individual to gently move the affected body part to increase blood supply to that area
* Be gentle, as frozen tissue can be damaged easily. Do not rub or break blisters and do not massage the frozen area or rub it with snow or ice
* Bring the individual to the nearest Emergency Room for evaluation and treatment.
* Inform the nurse and/or supervisor

**\* *Adapted from Dr. Paul Roumeliotis’ (an American Board of Pediatric certified MD web site:*** *http://www.drpaul.com .*