Ice and Cold Water Safety

Each winter many people are injured from exposure in cold water. Skaters and ice fishermen fall through the ice; boaters and canoeists capsize. Learn how to protect yourself and others.

What do you do if someone falls through the ice?

- **Call 911 immediately.** Make sure properly trained and equipped rescue personnel are alerted to respond.
- **DO NOT go out onto the ice.** Many would-be rescuers have become victims themselves.
- **Reach, throw, or row.** Extend a branch, pole or ladder to the victim. Throw them a buoyant object such as a life ring or float tied to a rope. If a boat is nearby, row out to the victim or push it towards them.

How cold is cold water?

Any water that is cooler than normal body temperature (98.6˚ F) is, by definition, cold water. Cold water drains away your body heat 25 to 30 times faster than air! Cold water does not have to be icy, it just has to be colder than you are to cause **hypothermia.**

The lower the temperature of the water, the faster the onset of hypothermia.

What is hypothermia?

Hypothermia is the excessive lowering of body temperature. Core body temperature below 95˚F causes shivering, confusion, and loss of muscle strength. If not treated and reversed, hypothermia leads to unconsciousness and death.

Safety experts estimate that half of all drowning victims die from the fatal effects of cold water, not from water-filled lungs!

What do you do if you fall into cold water?

- Get into **HELP** (Heat Escape Lessening Position). Bring your knees to your chest, hold your arms to your sides and clasp your hands. Cover your head if possible to protect your body from heat loss.
- **DO NOT try to swim** unless a boat, floating object, or the shore is close by. Swimming causes warm blood to circulate to your arms and legs, where it cools off quickly and reduces survival time by as much as 35-50%!
- If you are in the water with other people, **huddle** tightly together with your arms around each other to preserve body heat.

HELP

Huddle

over ➔

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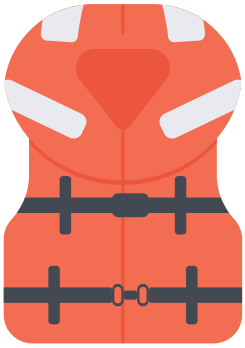
Personal safety



Always wear a personal floatation device (PFD) when boating, any time of year.

Waterlogged clothing makes it difficult to keep your head above the surface of the water.

Dress properly

Clothing that is made from man-made fibers does not protect the wearer for long when wet. Wool insulates better from the effects of hypothermia when dry or wet. Keep your head covered, 50% of body heat is lost through the head.

How thick is safe ice?

Ice on moving water in rivers, streams and brooks is never safe. The thickness of ice on ponds and lakes depends upon water currents or springs, depth and natural objects such as tree stumps or rocks. Daily changes in temperature cause the ice to expand and contract, which affects its strength. Because of these factors, no one can declare the ice to be absolutely "safe."

The only safe ice is at a skating rink!