

# Hypothermia: The Silent Killer

## Troop 518 Training

### What Is Hypothermia

Hypothermia occurs when the body loses heat faster than it can be produced. This means the body's core temperature drops. The most important preventative of hypothermia is to recognize its symptoms. To help do this, think **C-O-L-D**.

**C** = Change in mental status

As the body's temperature drops from the normal 98.6° F the brain begins to cool. The results are, the brain is not thinking as quickly and efficiently. This creates an apathetic attitude that contributes to loss of judgment.

**O** = Onset of shivering

As the body's temperature drops from the normal 98.6° F the brain tells the body to start shivering to help maintain the body's temperature needs. Shivering produces heat. The shivering will increase as the body's temperature lowers. When the body reaches 92° F the shivering will cease.

**L** = Loss of coordination

Coordination begins to fail when the body temperature drops between 96 - 94° F. Fine motor coordination becomes impaired, effecting the use of fingers. Speech becomes thick and slurred. Between 95 - 92° F gross motor coordination is affected. The victim will begin tripping, stumbling, and falling. There is muscular rigidity. The body is freezing!

**D** = Doomed

Below 92° the pupils are dilated and the victim is slipping into unconsciousness. Death is not too far off.

Symptoms of hypothermia can also be indicated by the "umbles":

- Grumble
- Mumble
- Fumble
- Stumble

### Hypothermia Prevention

An ounce of prevention is worth your life. Remember **W-A-R-M-T-H**.

**W** = Wet

When wet, get dry and stay dry. A wet body and clothes will act like an air conditioner. So stay out of the wind as well.

A = Attire

Wear clothes that minimize heat loss, even when wet. Wool and polypropylene stay warm when wet. Wear as little cotton as possible. Never use cotton as your primary protection against cold.

R = Raingear

Always be prepared for rain. It can occur without warning.

M = Munch

Snack often on carbohydrates. The body needs fuel to burn if you're going to maintain heat.

T = Thermoregulation

Dress in layers that can be shed or added as activity increases or outside temperatures begin to drop. Stay warm, do not overheat or sweat. Remember your hat and gloves.

H = H<sub>2</sub>O

Drink plenty of fluids. Water and fruit juices are best. Avoid alcohol. It will make an individual do stupid things, as well as dilate the blood vessels to cool the body more rapidly. Alcohol also gives a false sense of warmth.

### **Treatment of Hypothermia**

Hypothermia is a true emergency and immediate actions needs to be taken. A way to remember how to treat hypothermia is to think R-E-W-A-R-M.

R = Recognize

Recognize what hypothermia is and what its danger signs are.

E = Environment

It is important that shelter is found for the victim. It must be away from the wind, it must be dry and it must be warm.

W = Wet

All hypothermia victims are wet. The moisture may be from sweat or it could be from falling into a stream. Get the victim stripped of all wet clothes. Get the victim dry and keep them dry.

A = Apply insulation

Insulate the victim from wind and make every effort to maintain any body heat that may be recovered. Keep the victim off the ground. Insulate the head and feet because 80% of all body heat leaves the extremities.

R = Refuel

Refuel the body if the victim is conscious. It is important that the victim drink sweetened liquids to help improve energy reserves that have been depleted by shivering.

M = Monitor

Monitor the breathing and vital signs. Keep a close eye on the victim and get to a hospital as soon as possible.

Remember: When your most important tool (the brain) fails you, the body is in trouble.

### **Conclusions**

- Go ahead and enjoy the outdoors.
- Plan ahead. Allow plenty of time; take plenty of food and water.
- Don't over exert yourself!
- Be prepared for changing weather conditions. All hypothermia victims are wet!
- Remember the danger signs of shivering, confusion, apathy and stumbling.
- For a person with these symptoms, time is running out.
- Hypothermia is a true emergency. Take emergency action as soon as it's detected!
- Follow these guidelines and live to see and enjoy another day.