



# COLD WEATHER HAZARDS

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Several potential hazards exist when winter temperatures fall below zero. This Toolbox Talk addresses three of them.

**Frostbite** is damage to skin and tissue caused by exposure to freezing temperatures. It can cause loss of feeling and color in affected areas. It can affect any part of the body; however, the nose, ears, cheeks, chin, fingers and toes are most likely to be affected. Frostbite can permanently damage body tissue and, in severe cases, can lead to amputation. The risk of frostbite is increased when individuals do not dress appropriately for the weather conditions.

Symptoms of frostbite include numbness; tingling or stinging; aching; and bluish, pail or waxy skin. If you think you are suffering from frostbite, get into a warm location as soon as possible. Unless absolutely necessary, do not walk on frostbitten feet. This increases the damage. Warm the affected area using body heat. For example, place a frostbitten hand under your arm. Do not rub or massage the affected area, because doing so can cause more damage to the skin. Do not use a heating pad, heat lamp, stove, fireplace or radiator for warming. Affected areas are numb and can easily burn.

**Trench foot**, also known as immersion foot, is caused from prolonged exposure to wet and cold conditions. It can occur at temperatures as high as 60 degrees Fahrenheit if the feet are constantly wet. Wet feet lose heat 25 times faster than dry feet. Therefore, to prevent heat loss, the body constricts blood vessels to shut down circulation in the feet. Skin tissue begins to die due to lack of oxygen and nutrients.

Symptoms of trench foot include reddening of the skin, numbness, leg cramps, swelling, tingling pain and bleeding under the skin. If you are suffering from trench foot, you should remove shoes/boots and wet socks, dry your feet and avoid walking, as this may cause tissue damage.

**Chilblains** are caused when the skin is repeatedly exposed to temperatures ranging from just above freezing to as high as 60 degrees Fahrenheit. The cold causes damage to the capillary beds (groups of small blood vessels) in the skin. This damage is permanent, and the redness and itching (typically on cheeks, ears, fingers and toes) will return with additional exposure.

Symptoms of chilblains include redness, itching, possible blistering, inflammation and possible ulceration in severe cases. If you have chilblains you should avoid scratching, slowly warm the skin, use corticosteroid creams to relieve itching and swelling and keep blisters and ulcers clean and covered.

[Download the recording form here.](#)