

## What are the health effects of extreme cold weather?

Exposure to extreme cold weather can be harmful to our health.

### Health effects can include:

#### Hypothermia:

- Uncontrollable shivering, drowsiness or exhaustion, confusion, tremors, slurred speech, decreased pulse, cardiac arrest or coma (in severe cases)

#### Trench foot (foot tissue damage from prolonged exposure to wet and cold):

- Pain, numbness, leg cramps, swelling, blisters, ulcers, bleeding under the skin, gangrene

#### Frost bite:

- Irritation, tingling and burning, discoloured skin, blistering, ulceration

#### Wind burn:

- Excessive dry skin, redness, soreness, itchiness

#### Previously stable chronic health conditions can get worse:

- Asthma, cardiac disease, chronic bronchitis, emphysema

#### Conditions can get worse because people are unable to access their health care provider or medication:

- Diabetes, neurological conditions (such as seizure disorders)
- Opioid use disorder

#### Injuries:

- Slip and fall in icy conditions
- Burns and thermal injuries if people try to burn paper, wood, or coal to keep warm
- Carbon monoxide poisoning from gas stoves and heaters

## Who is at higher risk of health effects due to cold weather?

- People who are unhoused
- People living alone
- People on medications that can make it more difficult to protect themselves from the cold
- People who use substances
- People who spend a prolonged amount of time or work outdoors
- Infants and young children
- Older adults (age 65 and over)
- People who have physical or mental disabilities

## What should housing service providers do?

### Accept

- Continue to accept clients needing shelter spaces through extreme weather events
- Follow public health recommendations for communicable disease prevention as far as possible while accepting clients

### Assess

- Assess clients' needs for additional supports, including overdose prevention services (e.g., [episodic overdose prevention services](#))
- Enable clients to take appropriate precautions for winter hazards

### Aware

- Monitor news alerts for changing weather patterns
- Be aware of health effects of cold weather
- Watch for early warning signs of severe health effects

### Alert

- Alert clients and those who support them that winter hazards are expected to occur or exist
- Call 911 in case hypothermia or frostbite are suspected



Try to store naloxone at room temperature. If naloxone freezes, it is still safe to use after it thaws.



### Check weather reports and apps:

- [Public Weather Alerts for British Columbia](#)
- [WeatherCAN](#)