

Winter Hazards



Every year, winter brings many safety challenges. Cold temperatures can cause frostbite, hypothermia, and other cold-related injuries, snow can cause hazardous driving conditions, and ice can cause slips and falls. If you work outdoors you should take special precautions in the winter months to ensure your safety. Below are the common winter hazards and what you can do to stay safe.

Cold-Related Injuries

The two most common injuries caused by cold temperatures are frostbite and hypothermia. Frostbite is an injury caused by freezing of the skin and underlying tissues. Common symptoms include reddened skin, numbness, hardness, and blisters in the affected part. Hypothermia occurs when body heat is lost faster than it can be replaced and normal body temperature (98.6°F) drops to less than 95°F. Common symptoms include disorientation, shivering, and loss of consciousness. Below are methods to protect yourself from cold-related injuries:

- ✓ **Be prepared:** Check the weather forecast as part of your regular routine so you'll know when to expect cold temperatures.
- ✓ **Dress appropriately:** Wear several layers of clothing and cover exposed skin, even if you don't think you'll be outdoors much.
- ✓ **Adjust your schedule:** Avoid being outside during the coldest part of the day.
- ✓ **Stay hydrated:** Drink plenty of liquids such as water and warm, sweet beverages.
- ✓ **Take frequent breaks:** Allow your body to warm up in dry areas.
- ✓ **Use the buddy system:** Monitor yourself and your coworkers. Look for signs of cold-related injuries, such as shivering and disorientation.

Tips for Success When Talking to Your Team

Preparation is Key: Keep the topic relevant. Work with your team to review the various types of winter hazards in your workplace and discuss control methods to stay safe when working in cold temperatures.

Stay Positive: Keep the focus on what can be done to create a safe workplace, instead of focusing on what has gone wrong in the past.

Share a Story, Ask for a Story: Storytelling is a powerful method to convey information. Stories from your employees make the topic even more relatable.

Drive Safe, Be Safe

Winter driving can be hazardous when there is snow or ice on the roadways. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, over 1,300 people are killed and more than 116,800 people are injured in vehicle crashes on snowy or icy pavement annually in the United States. Northwestern's [Safe Driver Program](#) establishes University vehicle use and safety requirements for those who drive on behalf of the University. Below are some helpful tips to prevent vehicle collisions during inclement weather in the winter months:

- ✓ Avoid taking unnecessary trips.
- ✓ Clear snow and ice off your vehicle to ensure your visibility is not blocked.
- ✓ Drive slow and increase your following distance between other vehicles.



On Ice and Snow... Take It Slow

Slips and falls on ice and snow are common occurrences during winter months. Injuries that can result from slips and falls include fractures, bruises, and back and head injuries. Here at Northwestern, there have been 13 injuries in the past 6 years involving slips and falls on ice, sleet, or snow. To prevent injuries on slippery surfaces, wear proper footwear, plan ahead, walk carefully by taking short steps, walk at a slow pace, and use stair rails.

Learn more: Please review the Occupational Safety and Health Administration's [Winter Weather Guidelines](#), the American Conference of Governmental Industrial Hygienist's [Work/Warm-up Schedule](#), and complete [Cold Stress in the Workplace](#) training.

Report all injuries on the Risk Management [website](#) or 847.491.5084

Safety at Home – Have a Plan this Winter!

With the cold winter months beginning, consider these safety tips to protect you and your family while shoveling and removing snow:

- ✓ Warm-up before the activity by doing stretches or other light exercises.
- ✓ Dress appropriately including a hat, scarf, coat, gloves, and water-resistant boots.
- ✓ Choose the right shovel and scoop small amounts of snow at a time.
- ✓ Use the proper lifting technique to avoid injuries: Keep your back straight, lift with your legs and do not turn or twist your body. Visit Risk Management's Spotlight on Safety on [Back Injuries and Lifting](#) for more information.
- ✓ When possible, push the snow instead of lifting it.
- ✓ Watch for slippery and icy areas and salt surfaces to avoid slips.

For Additional Information

Contact Gwen Butler, Director, Environmental Health & Safety, at 847.491.4936.

Do you or your team have a safety story you'd like to share? Contact Risk Management at gwen.butler@northwestern.edu for details.