



## Preparing for Winter

As we approach another holiday season at Northwestern, you should be aware of the many hazards associated with winter weather conditions. Low temperatures can cause cold stress and fatigue, and snow and ice can cause hazardous walking, working, and driving conditions, which may result in accidents and injuries. Taking special precautions in the winter months will ensure your safety and the safety of your colleagues.

### Cold-related injuries

Cold working environments (e.g., outdoors, poorly insulated areas) can reduce skin and body temperatures, which can lead to injuries such as:

- **Frostbite:** Redness and pain in the skin, followed by white or grayish-yellow skin, unusually firm or waxy skin, and/or numbness
- **Hypothermia:** Shivering and exhaustion, confusion and fumbling hands, memory loss, slurred speech, and/or drowsiness
- **Trench foot:** Caused by prolonged exposure to wet and cold conditions and can result in reddening skin, tingling/numbness, pain, swelling, cramps, and blisters

### Protect yourself from the cold

- ✓ **Check the local forecast** regularly so you know when to expect cold, snowy, and icy conditions.
- ✓ **Adjust your schedule** to avoid being outside during the coldest part of the day.
- ✓ **Wear several layers of clothing** and cover exposed skin, even if you don't think you'll be outdoors much.
- ✓ **Take frequent breaks** in warm, dry areas to allow your body to warm up.
- ✓ **Stay hydrated** by drinking water and warm beverages.
- ✓ **Learn More** by completing online Cold Stress in the Workplace [training](#).

### Tips for Success When Talking to Your Team

**Preparation is Key:** Be aware of weather advisory days and plan work accordingly. Work with your team to review winter weather hazards in your work area and discuss how the hazards can be avoided.

**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.

## Safe winter driving

Road hazards increase during the winter due to more ice and snow on the road. According to the U.S. Department of Transportation, 24% of weather-related vehicle crashes occur in the winter, and 15% happen during snowfall or sleet each year. Below are some safe driving tips to keep in mind during inclement weather conditions:

- Plan your route before you drive, avoid taking unnecessary trips, and find the safest route (e.g., main, well-lit roads and intersections).
- Drive at a slow and safe speed and increase your following distance between other vehicles.
- Ensure your visibility is not blocked by clearing ice and snow off your windows before driving.

### Winter slips and falls

Ice and snow create more risks for slips, trips, and falls, which are the main sources of workplace injuries. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 41% of weather-related fatal work injuries were caused by ice, sleet, or snow in 2020. To prevent slips and falls on slippery surfaces:

- Wear proper waterproof footwear with good traction and insulation and walk carefully by taking short steps and walking at a slow pace.
- Try to stay on sidewalks and clear paths; avoid taking shortcuts (e.g., walking through snow piles).
- Prior to entering buildings, remove snow from your footwear to avoid creating slippery conditions for others.

**Report all injuries** [online](#) or call (847) 491-5582

## Winter well-being

The seasons can affect you emotionally, and your overall well-being is just as important as your physical safety. Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a type of depression that usually occurs in climates and periods with less sunlight, such as the winter. Symptoms include persistent low moods, decreased energy levels, and irritability.

Take advantage of Northwestern's Human Resources Well-Being [Program](#), which provides resources to benefit the physical and emotional well-being of staff, faculty, and their families.

**For Additional Information** Contact Environmental Health & Safety at [ehs@northwestern.edu](mailto:ehs@northwestern.edu)