

These shared notes are based on my actual experience and knowledge learned from many situations and sources. They are in no way intended to replace a provincially regulated First Aid course.

Hypothermia

Hypothermia can be a life threatening condition. It is when the body's core temperature becomes lower than the individual's normal temperature which is usually about 98.6 F or 37 C. This can occur slowly as with the elderly or small children living in an improperly heated home or it can occur rapidly such as when someone breaks through ice covered water. Both can be fatal.

Hypothermia can be MILD, MODERATE, or SEVERE.

Common signs or symptoms of MILD hypothermia are;

- Shivering and complaining of cold, maybe some numbness and a person's body temperature will be slightly below normal.

Common signs or symptoms of MODERATE hypothermia are;

- Shivering, numbness, lack of muscle coordination and/or speech. As it progresses farther there may be unusual or confused behavior and impaired judgment. Changes in skin colour to a bluish, pale, waxy or bloodless appearance.

Common signs or symptoms of SEVERE hypothermia are;

- Person has usually stopped shivering, they have stopped complaining of the cold, more severe lack of coordination and/or speech, changes in level of consciousness, changes in normal breathing and heart rate which will be rapid in early stages and slow in later stages. You may even notice facial bloating.

Later stages;

- Muscular rigidity, unconsciousness, cardiac arrest. The abdomen will feel cold to the back of your hand.

Never assume someone found stiff is dead. In possible hypothermic situations a person is not dead till they are warm and dead.

Emergency Care for hypothermia;

- CALL 911/EMS for severe hypothermia. For Mild to Moderate hypothermia; treat the person gently, get them away from the cold, remove wet clothing and dry them (you lose body heat 240 times faster with wet clothes)
- Warm them slowly because warming too quickly can cause heart problems; if their level of consciousness is not altered you can give warm (not hot) non-caffeinated liquids, if later stages are suspected do not allow them to exercise.

If you have any doubts or concerns with any level of hypothermia call 911/EMS to get medical attention right away.

Ed Linton
"FireDog"