



# **M&M SAFETY ALERT**

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## **WINTER WEATHER ALERT**

- **Inpatient and CSN clients are at risk for winter weather injuries. To avoid cold-related complications, assure that patients:**
  - **Dress in multiple layers of loose, dry clothing**
  - **Wear a heavy winter or water/wind resistant coat and boots**
  - **Adequately cover hands, feet, face, nose and head. A warm hat or hood is critical as up to 40 percent of the body's heat is lost if the head isn't covered**
  - **Wear a hat, scarf, and mittens/gloves**
  - **Wear sturdy shoes and boots with a good tread**
  - **Don't stay outdoors too long in extreme cold (including waiting for a bus)**
  - **Don't walk on frozen ponds or lakes—never assume that ice is “safe”**
  - **Be careful when walking on steps, sidewalks or streets which may be slippery and increase the risk of falling.**
  - **Be sure that patients about to be discharged and CSN patients have functioning furnaces at their places of residence.**
  - **Be very careful with any heating elements (space heaters, fireplaces, furnaces, etc.) Assure they are in good working order and not near combustible materials before use.**

- **Watch out for hypothermia:**
  - Hypothermia is a serious, but avoidable consequence of cold exposure, resulting in abnormally low body temperature and medical consequences
  - In cold temperatures, the body can lose heat faster than it can be produced. Prolonged exposure to the cold will eventually deplete the body's stored energy, resulting in hypothermia.
  - Due to effects on the person's brain function, the victim may become unable to think clearly or move well and may not recognize that hypothermia is occurring.
  - Hypothermia is most likely to occur in very cold weather, but can occur even at temperatures above 40 degrees Fahrenheit if a person becomes chilled from rain, sweat, or submersion in cold water.
- **Responding to hypothermia:**
  - Take the person's temperature. If it is below 95 degrees, get medical attention immediately
  - If medical care is not available, begin warming the person as follows:
    - Get the person into a warm room or shelter
    - Remove any wet clothing
    - Warm the center of the body first: chest, neck, head and groin using a blanket warmed in a dryer, or an electric blanket, if available and safe to do so.
    - Alternatively, use skin-to-skin contact under loose, dry layers of blankets, clothing, towels or sheets.
    - Warm beverages can help increase the body temperature, but do not offer alcoholic beverages. Never give beverages to an unconscious person.
    - After body temperature has increased, keep the person dry and wrapped in a warm blanket, including the head and neck.
    - Get medical attention as soon as possible.
  - A person with severe hypothermia may be unconscious and may not seem to have a pulse or to be breathing. Handle the person gently and get emergency assistance (911) immediately. Even if a person seems lifeless, CPR should be provided, and continued while the person is being warmed, until responsive or until medical aid becomes available. In some cases, a person with hypothermia who appears lifeless can be successfully resuscitated.

- **Avoid Frostbite:**
  - Frostbite is an injury to the skin caused by exposure to cold temperatures.
  - Keep all areas of the body covered. Fingers, toes, and face are the most vulnerable areas
  - At the first sign of redness or pain in any skin area, get out of the cold and protect any exposed skin.
  - Sign/Symptoms of frostbite include:
    - A white grayish-yellow skin color
    - Skin that feels unusually firm or waxy
    - Numbness.
- **Responding to Frostbite:**
  - If you detect symptoms of frostbite, seek medical care immediately.
  - If there is frostbite but no sign of hypothermia and immediate medical care is not available, proceed as follows:
    - Go to a warm room as soon as possible
    - Unless absolutely necessary, do not walk on frostbitten feet or toes, this increases damage
    - Immerse the affected area in warm, not hot, water (the temperature should be comfortable to the touch for unaffected parts of the body).
    - Or, warm the affected area using body heat. For example, the heat of an armpit can be used to warm frostbitten fingers.
    - **DO NOT RUB** the frostbitten area with snow, or massage it at all. This can cause more damage.
    - Don't use a heating pad, heat lamp, or the heat of a stove, fireplace, or radiator for warming. Affected areas are numb and can be easily burned.

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