
HEALTH DEPARTMENT
NEWS RELEASE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Health Department Urges Caution as First Wave of Extreme Cold Hits Kent County

GRAND RAPIDS – Extremely cold temperatures and dangerous wind chills are in the forecast for today and Friday across Michigan. Since this is the first time in almost a year that residents of Kent County will experience temperatures this frigid, the Kent County Health Department (KCHD) is urging caution and awareness.

Children and the elderly are especially at risk of frostbite and hypothermia. It is important to know the difference between the two and to take steps to avoid both conditions.

Frostbite is an injury to the body that is caused by freezing. Frostbite can cause a loss of feeling in the nose, cheeks, ears, fingers, chin and toes. At the first signs of redness or pain in any skin area, get out of the cold – frostbite may be beginning. White or grayish yellow skin, numbness or skin that feels unusually firm or waxy are all signs of frostbite. A victim is often unaware of frostbite until it is pointed out because the frozen tissues have become numb.

Hypothermia is a medical emergency that occurs when your body loses heat faster than it can produce it causing dangerously low body temperatures. Left untreated, hypothermia can eventually lead to complete failure of the heart and respiratory system resulting in death. Warning signs of hypothermia include shivering, exhaustion, confusion, fumbling hands, slurred speech and drowsiness. Infants may exhibit very low energy and have bright red but cold skin.

“It is very important to seek medical attention immediately if you observe a person with the signs of hypothermia,” says Adam London, Administrative Health Officer with KCHD. “We also encourage people to look in on their elderly neighbors and family members often during this cold snap.”

Dressing in layers and limiting your exposure to the cold is your best protection against frostbite and hypothermia.

For more information about cold weather safety visit <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/index.html>.

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KCHD has been in the business of providing health services to Kent County since 1931. The Health Department is home to nearly 265 employees including public health nurses, sanitarians, health educators, technicians, public health administrators, and specialized staff at the Kent County Animal Shelter. The Health Department operates one main clinic and three satellite clinics located in Kentwood, Rockford, and Grand Rapids. To learn more about KCHD services, visit www.accesskent.com/health.

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