



Winter Safety Tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics

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Whether winter brings severe storms, light dustings or just cold temperatures, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has some valuable tips on how to keep your children safe and warm.

What to Wear

- Dress infants and children warmly for outdoor activities. Several thin layers will keep them dry and warm. Don't forget warm boots, gloves or mittens, and a hat. Choose boots that are large enough to comfortably accommodate two pairs of socks.
- Remove drawstrings from clothing which may get caught on tree branches or play equipment. Replace with velcro.

- The rule of thumb for older babies and young children is to dress them in one more layer of clothing than an adult would wear in the same conditions.
- When riding in the car, babies and children should wear thin, snug layers rather than thick, bulky coats or snowsuits. See [Winter Car Seat Safety Tips](#) from the AAP for help keeping your little ones warm and safe in the car.
- Blankets, quilts, pillows, bumpers, sheepskins and other loose bedding should be kept out of an infant's sleeping environment because they are associated with suffocation deaths and may contribute to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). It is better to use sleep clothing like one-piece sleepers or wearable blankets.
- If a blanket must be used to keep a sleeping infant warm, it should be thin and tucked under the crib mattress, reaching only as far as the baby's chest, so the infant's face is less likely to become covered by bedding materials.

Hypothermia

- Hypothermia develops when a child's temperature falls below normal because of exposure to colder temperatures. It often happens when a youngster is playing outdoors in extremely cold weather without wearing proper clothing or when clothes get wet. It can occur more quickly in children than in adults.
- As hypothermia sets in, the child may shiver and become lethargic and clumsy. Speech may become slurred and body temperature will decline in more severe cases.
- If you suspect your child is hypothermic, call 911 at once. Until help arrives, take the child indoors, remove any wet clothing, and wrap him in blankets or warm clothes.

Frostbite

- Frostbite happens when the skin and outer tissues become frozen. This condition tends to happen on extremities like the fingers, toes, ears, and nose. Skin first becomes red and tingly, then gray and painful and finally white, cold and hard without pain. Blistering occurs after the skin thaws.
- Prevent frostbite by dressing in layers, covering all body parts when outside in cold weather. Bring children indoors if clothing gets wet.
- Playing in temperatures or wind chills below -15 F should be avoided because exposed skin begins to freeze within minutes.
- If frostbite occurs, bring the child indoors and place the frostbitten parts of her body in warm (not hot) water. 104° Fahrenheit (about the temperature of most hot tubs) is recommended. Warm washcloths may be applied to frostbitten nose, ears and lips.
- Administer acetaminophen or ibuprofen when you begin rewarming because as the skin thaws pain occurs.

- Do not rub the frozen areas.
- After a few minutes, dry and cover the child with clothing or blankets. Give him/her something warm to drink and seek medical attention immediately particularly if blistering occurs.

Winter Health

- If your child suffers from winter nosebleeds, try using a cold air humidifier in the child's room at night. Saline nose drops or petrolatum may help keep nasal tissues moist. If bleeding is severe or recurrent, consult your pediatrician.
- Many pediatricians feel that bathing two or three times a week is enough for an infant's first year. More frequent baths may dry out the skin, especially during the winter.
- Cold weather does not cause colds or flu. But the viruses that cause colds and flu tend to be more common in the winter when children are in school and are in closer contact with each other. Frequent hand washing and teaching your child to sneeze or cough into the bend of her elbow may help reduce the spread of colds and flu.
- Children 6 months of age and up should get the influenza vaccine to reduce their risk of catching the flu. It is not too late to get the vaccine! Around 80% of all influenza illness generally occurs in January, February, and March.

Winter Sports and Activities

Set reasonable limits on outdoor play to prevent hypothermia and frostbite and make sure kids have a place to go warm up when they get cold. When the weather is severe, have children come inside periodically to warm up.

Alcohol or drug use should not be permitted in any situation. They can be even more dangerous in winter activities like snowmobiling or skiing.

Ice Skating

- Allow children to skate only on approved surfaces. Check for signs posted by local police or recreation departments, or call your local police department to find out which areas have been approved.
- Advise your child to:
 - Skate in the same direction as the crowd
 - Avoid darting across the ice
 - Never skate alone
 - Not chew gum or eat candy while skating

- Consider having your child wear a helmet, knee pads, and elbow pads, especially while learning to skate

Sledding

- Keep sledders away from motor vehicles.
- Children should be supervised while sledding.
- Children, less than 5 years of age should not sled alone.
- Keep young children separated from older children.
- Sledding feet first or sitting up, instead of lying down head-first, may prevent head injuries.
- Consider having your child wear a (hockey not bicycle) helmet while sledding.
- Sleds should be structurally sound and free of sharp edges and splinters, and the steering mechanism should be well lubricated.
- Sled slopes should be free of obstructions like trees or fences, be covered in snow, not ice, not be too steep (slope of less than 30°), and end with a flat runoff.
- Avoid sledding in crowded areas.

Snow Skiing and Snowboarding

- Children should be taught to ski or snowboard by a qualified instructor in a program designed for children.
- Never ski or snowboard alone.
- Young children should always be supervised by an adult. Older children's need for adult supervision depends on their maturity and skill. If older children are not with an adult, they should always at least be accompanied by a friend.
- All skiers and snowboarders should wear helmets. Ski facilities should require helmet use, but if they do not, parents should enforce the requirement for their children.
- Equipment should fit the child. Skiers should wear safety bindings that are adjusted at least every year. Snowboarders should wear gloves with built-in wrist guards. Hip pads have been shown to be effective in preventing fractures as well. Eye protection or goggles should also be used.
- Slopes should fit the ability and experience of the skier or snowboarder. Avoid crowded slopes.
- Avoid skiing in areas with trees and other obstacles.

Snowmobiling

- The AAP recommends that children under age 16 do not operate snowmobiles and that children under age 6 never ride on snowmobiles.
- Do not use a snowmobile to pull a sled or skiers.

- Wear goggles and a safety helmet approved for use on motorized vehicles like motorcycles.
- Travel at safe speeds.
- Never snowmobile alone or at night.
- Stay on marked trails, away from roads, water, railroads, and pedestrians.

Sun Protection

The sun's rays can still cause sunburn in the winter, especially when they reflect off the snow. Make sure to cover your child's exposed skin with sunscreen and consider using sunglasses or goggles with UV protection.

Fire Protection

Winter is a time when household fires occur. It is a good time to remember to:

- Buy and install smoke alarms on every floor of your home
- Test smoke alarms monthly
- Practice fire drills with your children
- Install a carbon monoxide detector outside bedrooms
- Keep space heaters at least 3 feet away from anything that could burn, and turn them off when leaving the room or sleeping

(Information-[American Academy of Pediatrics](#))

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