



Clallam County Fire District 3

Motto: *Serve, Respect,
Prevent and Protect*

Frostbite

Frostbite is most common on the fingers, toes, nose, ears, cheeks and chin. Because of skin numbness, you may not realize you have frostbite until someone else points it out. Exposure to cold without adequate protection can result in frostbite.

Frostbite Prevention: Protect against frostbite by:

- ◆ Dressing warmly. Several thin layers will help keep you dry as well as warm. Clothing should consist of thermal long johns, turtlenecks, one or two shirts, pants, sweater, coat, warm socks, boots, gloves or mittens, and a hat.
- ◆ Setting reasonable time limits for outdoor exposure. Get out of the cold periodically to warm up with drinks such as hot chocolate.
- ◆ When possible, avoid taking infants outdoors when it is colder than 40 degrees Fahrenheit. Infants lose body heat quickly.

Signs and symptoms of frostbite include:

- At first, cold skin and a prickling feeling
- Numbness
- Red, white, bluish-white or grayish-yellow skin
- Hard or waxy-looking skin
- Clumsiness due to joint and muscle stiffness
- Blistering after rewarming, in severe cases



Frostbite occurs in several stages:

- ◆ **Frostnip** – The first stage of frostbite is frostnip, where your skin pales or turns red and feels very cold. Continued exposure leads to prickling and numbness in the affected area. As your skin warms, you may feel pain and tingling. Frostnip doesn't permanently damage the skin.
- ◆ **Superficial frostbite** – The second stage of frostbite appears as reddened skin that turns white or pale. The skin may remain soft, but some ice crystals may form in the tissue. Your skin may begin to feel warm, which is a sign of serious skin involvement. If you treat frostbite with rewarming at this stage, the surface of your skin may appear mottled, blue or purple. And you may notice stinging, burning and swelling. A fluid-filled blister may appear 24 to 36 hours after rewarming the skin.
- ◆ **Severe (deep) frostbite** – As frostbite progresses, it affects all layers of the skin, including the tissues that lie below. You may experience numbness, losing all sensation of cold, pain or discomfort in the affected area. Joints or muscles may no longer work. Large blisters form 24 to 48 hours after rewarming. Afterward, the area turns black and hard as the tissue dies.

Get emergency medical help if you suspect hypothermia, a condition in which your body loses heat faster than it can be produced.