

facts on

Winter Safety Tips

Saskatchewan winters are often filled with fun outdoor activities such as playing in the snow, skating, and sledding. It is important for caregivers to understand how to keep children safe during these activities.

Cold Temperatures

Proper Clothing

- Dress children in warm clothing, using layers that can be put on and taken off easily as the temperature changes.
- Cover heads with a warm, close-fitting hat that covers the ears.
- A tubular neck warmer should be used instead of a scarf. If a scarf is used, tuck ends into the jacket to avoid strangulation. Also remove strings and cords from children's winter clothing.
- Remove wet clothing and footwear as soon as possible to avoid additional chilling.
- Infants in infant carriers should not be dressed in thick clothing or multiple layers. Instead, place warm blankets over the infant after they are secured tightly in the seat. This makes it easier to regulate the infant's temperature to avoid overheating (a risk factor for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome) and ensures there is no extra padding between the infant and the harness. The extra padding compresses in a crash, causing the straps to become loose, possibly leading to injuries.

Other Cold Weather Considerations

- Children should not play outside alone in the winter; teach them to use a buddy system and look out for each other. Active adult supervision is needed for children under the age of 8.

- Provide children with warm fluids to help maintain their body temperature and to keep them hydrated.
- Be aware of the wind chill factor. Wind greatly increases the risk of frostbite and hypothermia.
- Be aware of the fire risks associated with space heaters. If you must use one, be sure that it is certified and has a shut-off to prevent overheating. Keep all space heaters at least 3 feet from combustible materials (e.g., furniture, curtains, bedding), and turn them off before going to sleep.

Dealing with Frostbite and Hypothermia

Frostbite occurs when a child's skin freezes. It usually affects the cheeks, ears, nose, hands, and feet. The first signs of frostbite include red, swollen skin that feels like it is stinging or burning. If the skin is not protected or warmed, the next signs are grey and tingling skin, followed by shiny and white skin that has no feeling.

If you suspect frostbite, slowly warm up the area using body heat (e.g., your hands). Do not rub snow on frostbitten skin. Seek medical attention if the skin is white/waxy.

Hypothermia occurs when the body loses more heat than it can produce and the core body temperature begins to drop. The stages of hypothermia range from the early stage (shivering, quick breathing) to the critical stage (trouble thinking, speaking, moving; breathing and pulse decrease).

For More Information

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Hypothermia continued

If you suspect hypothermia, call 911 or transport the child to the nearest medical facility. Before medical help is available, take the child to a warm, dry place, and remove any wet clothing. Warm the child's body by wrapping the child in a blanket or giving the child a lukewarm bath.

Winter Sports

Tobogganing and Sledding

- Make sure your child wears a well-fitted helmet with a thin, warm cap underneath. A ski or hockey helmet is recommended as they are designed for use in cold weather and for similar falls and speeds.
- Choose a hill that is cleared of trees, rocks, and other dangers and has a level area at the bottom for safe stopping, away from roads, rivers, or railroads.
- Teach your child to:
 - kneel or sit on the sled instead of sliding on their stomach
 - slide down the middle of the hill and to move out of the way quickly when they reach the bottom
 - climb up the side of the hill while watching above for other tobogganers

Skating

- Choose a hockey helmet that has a Canadian Standards Association (CSA) label.
- Your child's skates should fit snugly and provide firm ankle support. When carrying skates, use skate guards.
- If skating on a lake or pond, make sure the ice is smooth and at least 10 cm (4") thick if skating alone, and 20 cm (8") for skating parties or games. Stay away from newly-formed ice or ice with open water areas.

Skiing and Snowboarding

- A ski or snowboard helmet is recommended for your child to help prevent a head injury.

- Make sure your child understands the signs used to indicate the level of difficulty of a hill.
- Always check your child's equipment to make sure it is in good condition and fits properly.
- Teach your child to always:
 - follow the buddy system, and never ski or snowboard alone
 - stay on marked trails, and follow other rules of the slopes
 - stay alert to hazards such as rocks, trees, ice patches, other skiers, and changes in weather and visibility

Snowmobiling

- All snowmobile operators born on or after January 1, 1989 are required to complete a snowmobile safety training course. Children must be at least 12 years old to complete the safety course. However, it is recommended that children under the age of 16 do not operate a snowmobile.
- Children under the age of 6 should not ride on a snowmobile, even with an adult. "Kid-sized" snowmobiles should not be used.
- Do not pull people on saucers, tubes, sleds, or skis behind the snowmobile. If you do tow someone, use a spotter, go slow, and stay away from hazards.
- All riders should wear a properly fitting, approved helmet on every ride. Close-fitting clothing and goggles are also important.
- Be aware of hazards such as thin ice, fences, culverts, and railway tracks. Travel unfamiliar terrain slowly, especially if travelling at night.
- Follow safety precautions, use brightly coloured antenna flags, and carry a cellular phone and emergency kit.

Select References

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