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Sauk County Advises Residents of Extreme Cold

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Sauk County Public Health and Emergency Management officials advise residents of extreme cold temperature conditions today and tomorrow. The combination of cold temperatures and high winds can increase the risk of developing hypothermia. Hypothermia is a condition of abnormally low body temperature. Exposed to cold temperatures, your body begins to lose heat faster than it can be produced. Prolonged exposure to cold will eventually use up your body's stored energy. The result is hypothermia. Body temperature that is too low affects the brain, causing unclear thinking and inhibiting body movement. This could cause a person to not know what is happening and he or she won't be able to respond normally. Emergency management and public health officials urge residents to take steps to prevent hypothermia.

Victims of hypothermia are most often (1) elderly people with inadequate food, clothing or heating; (2) babies sleeping in cold bedrooms; and (3) people who remain outdoors for long periods - the homeless, hikers, hunters, etc. You should recognize the warning signs associated with hypothermia:

- **Adults and Children:** shivering, exhaustion, confusion, fumbling hands, memory loss, slurred speech and drowsiness.
- **Infants:** bright red or cold skin, very low energy.

If you notice any of the signs mentioned above, take the person's temperature - if below 95°F, the situation is an emergency - get medical attention immediately. If medical care is not available, begin warming the person, as follows:

- Get the victim into a warm room or shelter.
- If the victim has on any wet clothing, remove it.
- Warm the center of the body first - chest, neck, head and groin - using an electric blanket, if available. Or 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 give alcoholic beverages. Do not try to 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 be breathing. In this case, handle the victim gently, and get emergency assistance immediately. Even if the victim appears dead, cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) should be provided. CPR should continue while the victim is being warmed, until the victim responds or medical aid becomes available. In some cases, hypothermia victims who appear to be dead can be successfully resuscitated.

Emergency management and public health officials encourage everyone to take preventative action against hypothermia. Have furnaces checked annually for efficient and safe operation before the heating season arrives. Check on elderly relatives, friends and neighbors. Monitor the rooms where infants sleep or spend periods of time. When spending time outdoors, adults and children should dress warmly and stay dry. Layer clothing, preferably wind resistant, to reduce loss of body-heat caused by the wind. Tell relatives and friends where you are going and when you expect to return. Do not ignore shivering. It's an important first sign that the body is losing heat. Persistent shivering is a signal to return indoors.

For more information about hypothermia or frostbite, visit <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/> or contact your local health department at 608-355-3290.

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