

NEWS

FRIGID TEMPS POSE FROSTBITE THREAT FOR KIDS

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Below freezing temperatures are a common occurrence in Miami during the winter, increasing parents' concern over their kids spending too much time outdoors.

When the temperature dips below freezing, it can take fewer minutes than you might realize to get frostbite and even fewer to get frostnip. Kids are more at risk because their little bodies lose heat much faster than adults.

While frostnip is a much more common occurrence, it's important to understand the difference and know when to seek medical care.

"Due to their smaller stature and the increased likelihood they don't recognize the symptoms of frostnip or frostbite, children are at an increased risk," said Scott Williams, D.O. of family medicine at Integris Miami Hospital.

Frostbite is basically a mild form of frostnip and can usually be treated at home by removing wet clothing and placing chilled

body parts in warm, not hot, water until sensation returns.

"The first step if frostnip or frostbite is present is to rewarm the injured extremities," Williams said. "Soaking in warm water for up to 30 minutes can be helpful."

Frostnip is a superficial injury usually identified by slight changes in skin color, such as fingers turning red, and skin may feel numb.

"Symptoms of frostnip include cool, pale extremities," said Williams. "Fingertips can often be painful or tingle. This will typically improve once the person warms back up."

Frostbite is much more serious and requires a doctor's care. Skin can go from being red to white or grayish-yellow. The skin may tingle, feel numb or feel like it's burning. The skin may also feel hard, swollen and/or warm to the touch. In severe cases of frostbite, blisters can form and the skin can turn black if the tissue starts to die.

"Frostbite is a more severe condition in which freezing and tissue damage have occurred," Williams

“While frostnip is a much more common occurrence, it's important to understand the difference and know when to seek medical care.”

said. "Extremities will often continue to be red and painful even after warming. In more severe cases blistering will occur. The most severe outcome is hypothermia in which a person may be confused or sedated from prolonged cold exposure."

"Frostnip can be safely treated at home. If signs of frostbite are present, then please see a medical provider. If signs of hypothermia are present, please seek emergency medical care."

The most common parts of the body to be impacted by frostnip or frostbite are the extremities, such as the

fingers, toes, ears and nose. When playing outdoors in cold, windy weather, kids must be bundled up properly to protect these vulnerable areas and the rest of their bodies.

This means wearing several loose layers. It's best if the inner layer is moisture-wicking and the outer layer is windproof and waterproof. Mittens are warmer than gloves and wearing a hat is extremely important because you lose 50% of your body heat from your head.

All shoes and gloves should fit well but not be tight, which can cut off circulation. Poor circulation



This snow baby is wearing layers, a thick hat and mittens to stay warm while she creates her very first snow angel. Then, she immediately went indoors to put on dry clothes and warm up.

makes feet and hands colder.

Williams said that although data doesn't seem to be readily available on the rates of occurrence of frostnip or frostbite in Oklahoma, the risk of either is greatly increased any time temperatures remain below freezing.

Experts generally agree

that it's okay for kids to play outside when the temperature is below freezing (32 degrees Fahrenheit), as long as they come inside to warm up every 20 to 30 minutes. However, it's not recommended for kids to play outdoors if the windchill drives the temperature below 13 degrees.

Playing in the snow is great fun and builds lasting memories of childhood. Just make sure your kids are dressed properly for the weather with ears, toes and fingers well covered. Also, teach them the signs of frostnip and ensure they understand the importance of coming inside frequently to warm up.



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