

Winter Health & Safety

Along with the drop in temperatures and chance for snow, winter brings with it potential health and safety hazards for children. How can you keep your children safe and warm this winter? The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) offers these valuable tips:

- Dress infants and children warmly for outdoor activities. Several thin layers will keep them dry and warm. Clothing for children should consist of thermal long johns, one or two shirts, pants, sweater, coat, warm socks, boots, gloves or mittens, and a hat. The rule of thumb for babies and young children is to dress them in one more layer of clothing than an adult would wear in the same conditions.
- Cold weather does not cause colds or flu. But the viruses that cause colds and flu tend to be more common in the winter. Frequent hand washing and teaching your child to sneeze or cough into the bend of their elbow or shoulder may help reduce the risk of catching the flu.
- Children six months of age and older should get a flu shot to reduce their risk of catching the flu.
- If your child suffers from winter nosebleeds, try using a cold air humidifier in the child's room at night. Saline nose drops may help keep nasal passages moist. If bleeding is severe or recurrent, consult your pediatrician. Always consult your pediatrician before giving your child any over-the-counter drugs.
- 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.
- Blankets, quilts, pillows, and other loose bedding may contribute to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and should be kept out of an infant's sleeping environment. Sleep clothing, like one-piece sleepers, is preferred.



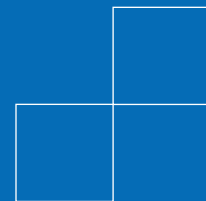
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Winter Health & Safety

Winter sports and activities

Ice-skating and sledding are just two outdoor activities kids can enjoy during the winter months. To keep your child safe, it is important to set reasonable time limits on outdoor play. Have your children come inside periodically to warm up. This will help prevent winter ailments such as frostbite or hypothermia. In addition to keeping warm, the AAP suggests these tips to keep you safe while ice-skating, sledding, skiing, or snowboarding:

Ice-skating

- Skate in the same direction as the crowd, avoid darting across the ice, and never skate alone.
- Do not chew gum or eat candy while skating.
- Consider having your child wear a helmet while ice-skating.

Sledding

- Supervise children while sledding, and keep young children separated from older children.
- Consider having your child wear a helmet while sledding.
- Keep sledders away from vehicles and avoid sledding in crowded areas.
- Use steerable sleds, not snow disks or inner tubes. 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 from trees or fences, be covered in snow (not ice), not be too steep (slope of less than 30 degrees), and end with a flat runoff.
- Sledding feet-first or sitting up, instead of lying down head-first, may prevent head injuries.

Skiing and snowboarding

- Children should be taught to ski or snowboard by a qualified instructor in a program designed for children. The AAP recommends that children under seven not snowboard.
- 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. Never ski or snowboard alone.
- 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. Consider having your child wear a helmet.
- Slopes should fit the ability and experience of the skier or snowboarder. Avoid crowded slopes. Also, avoid skiing in areas with trees and other obstacles.
- Sun protection is important. The sun's rays can still cause sunburn in the winter, especially when they reflect off snow. Make sure to cover exposed skin with sunscreen. Wearing sunglasses with UV protection are also a good idea for protecting your child's eyes.

Winter ailments

Frostbite happens when the skin and outer tissues become frozen. This condition tends to happen on extremities like the fingers, toes, ears, and nose. They may become pale, gray, and blistered. At the same time, the child may complain that their skin burns or feels numb. If frostbite occurs, bring the child indoors and place the frostbitten parts of their body in warm (not hot) water. Warm washcloths may be applied to frostbitten nose, ears, and lips, but do not rub the frozen areas. After a few minutes, dry and cover the child with clothing or blankets. Give your child something warm to drink. If the numbness continues for more than a few minutes, call your doctor.

Hypothermia develops when a child's temperature falls below normal due to exposure to cold. It often happens when a youngster is playing outdoors in extremely cold weather without wearing proper clothing. As hypothermia sets in, the child may shiver and become lethargic and clumsy. Their speech may become slurred and their body temperature will decrease. If you suspect your child is hypothermic, call 911 at once. Until help arrives, take the child indoors, remove any wet clothing, and wrap them in blankets or warm clothes.

Injury prevention research

Safe Kids Worldwide, a global network of organizations whose mission is to prevent accidental childhood injury, creates injury prevention programs. Safe Kids publishes frequent studies on common risks to children in the United States, and then makes recommendations to parents based on the findings. Research is essential to making sure their programs are targeted and effective. To learn about childhood injury facts and trends, visit safekids.org.