

Frostbite

What is frostbite?

Frostbite is an injury to the skin caused by freezing. It happens more often when it is very cold outside, or when it is cold and windy. It also happens when children do not wear warm clothes like hats, mittens and boots. Warm clothes that get wet can also cause frostbite.

The parts of the body most likely to get frostbite are the nose, ears, cheeks, chin, fingers, and toes. It causes a loss of feeling and color to the skin. Bad frostbite can lead to blistering, permanent numbness, future sensitivity to cold and scarring.

What does it look like?

- The skin will be cold and may look pale or white.
- The skin will sting or feel like it's burning.
- There may be no feeling in the skin at all.
- When the skin warms up it may get red, puffy, blister and hurt.



How is it treated?

At the first signs of redness or pain in any skin area, get out of the cold or protect any exposed skin. Frostbite may be starting.

If you think your child has frostbite, get the child someplace warm.

- Take off any wet clothes.
- Hold the cold body part in your warm hands, or under your armpits. **Do not rub the skin.**
- Put the affected area in lukewarm, **not hot**, water. The temperature should be comfortable to the touch.
- Don't use a heating pad, heat lamp, or the heat of a stove, fireplace, or radiator for warming. Affected areas are numb and can be easily burned.

How can it be prevented?

Stay inside or limit time outside when the temperature, or wind chill is below zero. If your child must go outside when it is cold, keep ears, hands, and feet warm and dry.

Anyone with poor circulation needs to be very careful in the cold.

ALERT: Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any concerns or if your child has:

- Any body part or area of skin that is white and hard after being in the cold.
- Red, puffy, sore or blistered skin after it warms up.
- Numbness, tingling or loss of feeling that lasts for more than a few minutes.
- Special health care needs not covered by this information.

This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.