

Cold-induced condition

FIRST AID FACT SHEET

How to treat a cold-induced condition

Cold-induced conditions occur when the body's core temperature drops below 35°C. The body's natural reaction is to prevent body heat escaping and does this by shutting down blood vessels in the skin.

What to do

1. Urgent medical aid. **Call Triple Zero (000)** for an ambulance.
2. Follow DRSABCD St John Action Plan (<https://stjohnwa.com.au/online-resources/first-aid-information-and-resources/drsabcd-action-plan>).
3. Remove the casualty to a warm, dry place
4. Protect the casualty and yourself from wind, rain, sleet, cold or wet ground
5. Help the casualty to lie down in a comfortable position
6. Handle the casualty as gently as possible and avoid excess activity or movement
7. Remove any wet clothing
8. To prevent further heat loss:
 - + Use an emergency blanket, or plastic wrap if available and place as close to the skin as possible, then apply blankets or other clothing to provide better insulation and minimise further heat loss.
9. Aim to stop the temperature dropping any lower rather than attempt rapid rewarming:
 - + DO NOT use radiant heat such as fire or electric heater; and
 - + DO NOT rub affected areas.
10. If a warm drink/hot drink is provided:
 - + Encourage the casualty to hold the cup to promote warming, and only take small sips; do not allow the casualty to consume rapidly or drink large amounts even when at a drinkable temperature.
 - + A warm drink may not improve the situation in the short term.
 - + They may eat if they want to.
 - + Try to avoid caffeine if at all possible (hot chocolate is preferable).
 - + Avoid alcohol.
11. CPR considerations for those with SEVERE hypothermia who are unconscious and not breathing normally:
 - + Where it is not possible to start CPR (for example if initially moving the person to a safer location), rescuers may consider delaying the onset of CPR for up to 10 minutes.
 - + Only where it is not possible to maintain the continuity of CPR (for example during transport), performing periods of at least 5 minutes of CPR with periods of no more than 5 minutes without CPR. Uninterrupted CPR should be resumed as soon as feasible.

Signs and symptoms

Feeling cold, shivering.
Clumsiness and slurred speech.
Apathy and irrational behaviour.

When body temperature drops very low:

Shivering usually ceases.
Pulse may be difficult to find.
Heart rate may slow.
Level of consciousness continues to decline.
Unconsciousness.
Cardiac arrest may occur.

Caused by

Exposure to cold, wet, or windy conditions
Immersion/submersion in cold water
Trauma, immobility and burns
Severe infections