

First Aid: Frostbite

Exposure to below-freezing temperatures can cause frostbite, a rare but serious condition that requires emergency care. Frostbite can affect any area of the skin, and in extreme cold can develop within minutes.

Signs and Symptoms

- aching pain or numbness, most often on hands, feet, face, and ears
- skin that feels hard and waxy, with a white or grayish yellow color

What to Do

If you think your child is frostbitten, **call the doctor right away.**

Begin these steps:

- Bring your child indoors immediately. Do not try to thaw frostbite unless you're in a warm place (warming and then re-exposing frozen parts to cold can cause permanent damage).
- Remove wet clothing.
- Do not rub frostbitten parts — treat them gently.
- Do not use dry heat — such as a fireplace, oven, or heating pad — to thaw frostbite.
- Do not break any blisters.
- Warm the frostbitten parts in warm (not hot) water for about 30 minutes.
- Place clean cotton balls between frostbitten fingers and toes after they've been warmed.
- Loosely wrap warmed areas with clean bandages to prevent refreezing.
- Give your child acetaminophen or ibuprofen for pain.

Seek Emergency Medical Care

If Your Child Has:

- a body part or area of skin that is turning white and hard

Think Prevention!

Stay updated on weather forecasts. Keep kids warm and dry in cold weather. Loose-fitting, layered warm clothes are best. Have kids wear well-insulated boots, thick socks, hats, scarves, and mittens. Ice packs applied directly to the skin can cause frostbite — always cover ice packs with a cloth before applying to the skin.