



Cold Exposure:

A Quick Guide for Service Providers in Pima County

Pima County is known for its summer heat, but low winter temperatures also pose significant threats of cold-related illnesses, especially in vulnerable populations such as individuals experiencing homelessness.

What Is Hypothermia?

Hypothermia occurs when the body loses heat faster than it can produce it, causing the body's core temperature to drop below 95°F. It can be life-threatening if not addressed quickly. Unsheltered populations are particularly at risk due to prolonged exposure to the cold.

A person may develop hypothermia before outdoor temperatures reach what is considered "cold." Temperatures as low as 40 degrees can put people at risk, especially if combined with wind, rain, or damp conditions.

Risk Factors for Hypothermia

- Prolonged exposure to cold, wet, or windy conditions
- Insufficient clothing or blankets
- Alcohol use or recreational drug use
- Diabetes
- Malnutrition
- Mental health disorders
- Active illnesses or infections
- Mobility constraints
- Age 55 or older

Symptoms of Hypothermia

- Shivering
- Confusion
- Slurred or delayed speech
- Slowed response time
- Fatigue or drowsiness
- Poor coordination or fumbling hands
- Slow breathing
- Unconsciousness

What to Do if You Suspect Hypothermia

If you think someone may have hypothermia, they should be referred for medical evaluation.

Immediate Care for Those Coming in From the Cold:

- If possible, remove wet clothing, and offer dry clothing and blankets.
- Provide warm beverages, especially broth or warm Gatorade, to restore electrolytes and hydration.
- Refer individuals for medical evaluation if they develop symptoms of hypothermia.

Additional Ways to Help:

- Provide warm, dry clothing or coverings.
- Avoid direct exposure to heaters or attempts to rapidly warm the person, as this can worsen their condition.
- Offer high-energy foods such as energy bars.
- Serve hearty soups and stews with high carbohydrates and protein.
- Encourage hydration by limiting coffee and offering decaf teas, water, warmed juices, or broth.
- Remind individuals that alcohol exacerbates heat loss and does not "warm you up."
- Assist with drying feet and provide dry socks and shoes.

Preventing Hypothermia

- Encourage staying inside as much as possible, especially for sleeping.
- Encourage people to dress in layers.
- Provide or encourage a hat or head covering—this helps decrease heat loss significantly.
- Provide or encourage mittens (warmer than gloves) and scarves.
- Encourage individuals to stay as dry as possible and seek shelter on cold or rainy nights.
- Ensure proper footwear, such as boots, shoes, and socks.

Additional Resources

In Tucson, **Operation Deep Freeze** goes into effect when overnight temperatures are forecasted to be 40°F or lower with rain, 35°F or lower without rain, or when wind chill factors indicate a health hazard from exposure. Shelter Options include:

Salvation Army Hospitality House

1002 N. Main Ave., Tucson.

Intake is between 2 p.m.–4 p.m.

Dinner is served between 5 p.m.–6 p.m.

Primavera Men's Shelter

200 E. Benson Highway.

Available to people identifying as male.

Intake at 4:30 p.m.

Unable to accommodate level 3 sex offenders.

Sister Jose's Women's Center

1050 S. Park Ave.

Available to people identifying as female.

Intake is at 9 a.m. to request a bed for the evening.

Return at 5 p.m. for admission and dinner.

Exit is at 7 a.m. the next morning, after breakfast.

While the shelters listed above may not accommodate animals, individuals seeking shelter during Operation Deep Freeze can request accommodation at a pet-friendly motel through the Sullivan-Jackson Employment Center.

For additional sheltering options, contact **Sullivan-Jackson Employment Center** (Monday - Friday, 8:00 a.m.–4:30 p.m.) at **520-724-7300**.

To check the status of Operation Deep Freeze, visit www.tpch.net