



# Health Care Alert

A QUARTERLY PUBLICATION PROVIDING HEALTH CARE TIPS FOR PEOPLE WITH INTELLECTUAL AND/OR DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES AND THEIR SUPPORT TEAMS

## Risk Management Corner

### Winter Safety 101

# WINTER

The temperature is dropping! Cold weather may bring many risks to your health. If you follow the simple guidelines below, you can prepare yourself and the individuals you support to weather the cold...

Some conditions may become worse in cold weather. These include:

- Raynaud's Phenomenon
- Asthma, COPD
- Hypertension
- Cardiovascular disease

Some conditions may be caused by exposure to cold or freezing weather. The severity of the damage suffered is dependent upon the temperature, the length of exposure, how the person is dressed, and the presence of risk factors such as pre-existing medical conditions, use of alcohol and smoking.

Some examples of weather related medical conditions are:

**Frostbite:** Frostbite refers to injury or destruction of skin and underlying tissue resulting from prolonged exposure to freezing or subfreezing temperatures. It most commonly affects the feet and hands (about 90%), the nose, or the ears. Most cases occur in adults between the ages of 30 and 49.

### Stages and Symptoms of Frostbite

#### Early frostbite (Frostnip)

- Initially there may be itching and pain, then the area becomes numb
- The skin and underlying muscle remain soft to the touch
- The skin becomes white and waxy in appearance

#### Superficial frostbite

- A burning sensation would be followed by numbness
- The skin feels hard, but the underlying

muscle would feel soft

- The skin may be white and waxy or grayish-yellow in appearance
- After thawing, blistering of the skin may occur

#### Deep frostbite (Freezing)

- The area would be totally numb
- The skin and underlying structures would feel hard to the touch
- The skin may turn gray or blue
- Blood clots, gangrene, and need for amputation may result

#### Treatment for frostbite

- Get out of the cold.
- Warm your hands by tucking them under your arms. If your nose, ears or face is frostbitten, warm the area by covering it with dry, gloved hands.
- Don't rub the affected area. Never rub snow on frostbitten skin.
- If there's any chance of refreezing, don't thaw out the affected areas. If they're already thawed out, wrap them up so they don't refreeze.
- Get emergency medical help if numbness remains during warming. If you can't get help immediately, warm severely frostbitten hands or feet in warm, not hot water

**Hypothermia:** Hypothermia is a condition where the body is losing heat faster than it can produce it resulting in an abnormally low body temperature (Usually occurs at < 95° F.)

#### Symptoms of early hypothermia

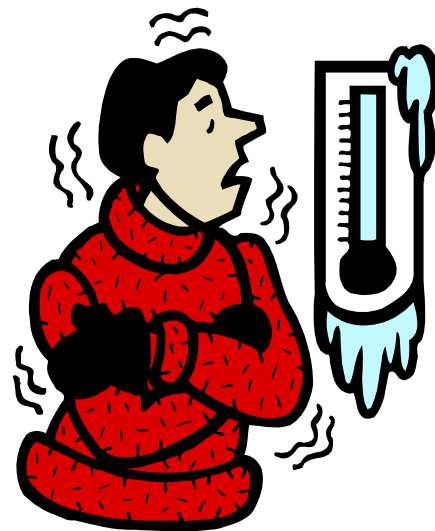
- Uncontrolled shivering
- Cold, pale or bluish skin
- Listlessness, apathy
- Change in mental status
- Poor judgment
- Balance problems
- Slurred speech
- Numb hands/feet

- Increase in heart rate, blood pressure, and respirations

#### Symptoms of severe hypothermia

- Cessation of shivering (Usually occurs when the body temperature falls below 90° F)
- Cold trunk (Feel abdomen)
- Muscular rigidity
- Visual disturbances
- Darkened, puffy skin
- Decrease in heart rate, blood pressure, and respirations
- Severe confusion
- Loss of consciousness

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The information presented to you is to increase your awareness of health conditions. It is not intended to replace medical advice. Please seek the advice of a physician for any health related concerns.

## Temple University Institute on Disabilities

### Communication Resources



The Institute on Disabilities at Temple University provides many valuable resources for communication and assistive technology. Services are available for individuals with communication needs, their family, friends and support staff. Here are some of the programs available;

#### Assistive Technology Device Demonstration

Pennsylvania's Initiative on Assistive Technology, [PIAT](#), now provides opportunities for "guided exploration" of a specific device or category of devices. Device demonstrations are available for people with disabilities and their families, as well as providers of education, health and related services and faculty responsible for teaching tomorrow's providers.

#### Information and Assistance to Obtain Funding for Assistive Technology

#### Pennsylvania's Assistive Technology Lending Library

Pennsylvania's Assistive Technology Lending Library is a free service that loans assistive technology devices to people with disabilities. It's available to Pennsylvanians of all ages and disabilities.

#### Telecommunication Device Distribution Program (TDDP)

Pennsylvania's Telecommunication Device Distribution Program (TDDP) provides specialized

equipment, without charge, to eligible Pennsylvanians with disabilities that impede independent access to telephone services.

To be eligible, you must:

- Be a Pennsylvania resident with a disability or disabilities that prevent you from making and/or receiving phone calls independently;
- Be six years of age or older;
- Have individual gross income of 200% of the federal poverty level or less (low income);
- Have current telephone service; and
- Have the ability to learn how to use the requested device(s).

If you can answer YES to ALL of the above questions, you may be eligible for free



equipment.

#### ACES: Augmentative Communication and Empowerment Supports

ACES: Augmentative Communication and Empowerment Supports is a year-long augmentative communication and empowerment program. It is designed to increase the communication effectiveness of adults with significant speech disabilities. ACES teaches participants to use voice output communication systems to enhance their communication. The program also welcomes friends, families, students, and professionals who are supporting people with significant speech disabilities. Participants learn about resources to help them develop a vision and plan for their future.

#### Augmentative Communication On-line Users' Group (ACOLUG)

The Augmentative Communication On-Line User's Group (ACOLUG) is an Internet Listserv which allows users of augmentative communication and their families to communicate with each other and with professionals who are interested in augmentative communication.

You can find more details including descriptions and contact information on the Institute on Disabilities website;

<http://disabilities.temple.edu>

## PCHC Cancer Prevalence Survey regarding:

### *Breast Cancer, Prostate Cancer, and Ovarian Cancer*

#### **Are people with intellectual/developmental disabilities being diagnosed with... Breast Cancer?...Prostate Cancer?...Ovarian Cancer?**



PCHC will be contacting provider agencies during the coming months to begin identifying how often people are being diagnosed with these cancers. The survey will also address the medical treatments people are receiving, counseling and related supports available. Information from this survey will be used to create a baseline of the prevalence of these cancers for people with intellectual/developmental disabilities in the Southeast Region of Pennsylvania. It will support PCHC's work for enhancing access to medical care and related supports for individuals struggling with these very difficult diagnoses.



## Things to Keep in Mind When Calling Your HCCO...

In the last edition of the Health Care Alert, the Health Care Community Outreach (HCCO) Specialist Department re-introduced themselves, the services they provide and the counties to which they are assigned. As a follow-up to that article, below is a list of informational items that should be prepared when calling a HCCO regarding technical assistance or an insurance problem.

Having this information readily available will help speed up the HCCO’s ability to research and respond.

To find the assigned HCCO for your agency or county, please visit PCHC’s website:

[www.pchc.org](http://www.pchc.org) and look for the [Nurse/Health Care Community Outreach Specialist agency/county assignment list](#).



- *Individual’s complete name*
- *Date of birth*
- *Social Security number*
- *Address*
- *ALL Insurance information: name and card numbers*
- *Provider agency*
- *Residential status*
- *Income information (ONLY if applicable to situation)*
- *Contact Name & Number*

Do you want to learn:

About the need for monthly Self Breast Exams?



*awareness*

How to complete a Self Breast Exam?

What is a Mammogram?

How to obtain a Mammogram?



Philadelphia Coordinated Health Care (PCHC) is offering a training to educate and raise awareness of manual breast examinations and mammograms for women with Intellectual and Development Disabilities (IDD) in Southeast Pennsylvania.

The first 20 agencies to host a training will receive a free copy of the film “What Every Woman Should Know” from The ARC of New Jersey. All participants will receive a free breast model.

For more information or to schedule a training, please contact the PCHC Education Department at extension: 3367.

## “Wheelchair Guide”

PCHC has produced a new booklet titled “The Wheelchair Guide” to assist individuals, family members, and support staff in acquiring and maintaining an appropriate wheelchair. The booklet describes the different types of wheelchairs, how to obtain one through insurance and provides valuable tips and recommendations for maintenance and repairs.

To obtain a copy, please contact a Health Care Community Outreach Specialist.



## Winter Safety 101 continued from cover

### Treatment for hypothermia

- Call for help immediately
- If possible, move to a warm, dry location, or protect from the wind
- Handle gently (Rough handling may cause a heart attack)
- Keep in a horizontal position, preferably on something warm and dry
- Replace wet clothes with dry clothes if possible. If not, cover wet clothing with dry blanket, pillows, newspapers... whatever is available
- If conscious, give warm (Non-caffeinated, nonalcoholic beverage)
- If unconscious start CPR, even if the person appears dead

*Now that you know some of the risks of cold exposure, let's look at ways that you may protect yourself. Clothing guidelines are the same for every age group.*

- As much as practical, keep your head, neck, and face covered by wearing a hat and a scarf or knit mask
- Clothing should be layered as follows:

- *Inner layers* should be snug, and made of wool, silk, or polypropylene, which hold heat better
- *Middle layers* should be wool blend or fleece worn loosely so the moisture next to your skin can vent outwards
- The *outer layer* should be wind/weather resistant
- Sleeves should be snug at the wrist
- Mittens provide finger to finger contact, which helps maintain better warmth. If wearing gloves use liners, this will keep your hands warm
- Protect feet with heavy socks and water-proof boots/shoes

### General Winter Safety Guidelines:

- Keep well hydrated (dehydration is a risk factor for hypothermia)
- Drink plenty of warm beverages, avoiding those which contain alcohol or caffeine
- Avoid smoking, which can cause heat loss
- Keep physically fit (fit people are less susceptible to hypothermia)



- Pace yourself during outside activity
- Follow a healthy diet
- Stay dry
- If exposed to excess cold, eat high energy foods like nuts and raisins
- Keep Durable Medical Equipment (DME) items like wheelchairs clean and in good working condition

### References Used:

<http://www.medicinenet.com/frostbite/page2.htm>

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000038.htm>

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/guide.asp#hypothermia>

<http://www.emedicinehealth.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=59291&pf=3&page=1>

<http://www.webmd.com/a-to-z-guides/hypothermia-and-cold-temperature-exposure-topic-overview>

## RN Update: Allergies & Antihistamines

Antihistamines or allergy medications are prescribed to many developmentally disabled individuals living in CLAs based on staff reporting allergy-like symptoms of nasal stuffiness and sneezing. Many physicians may prescribe antihistamines without ordering a diagnostic workup for allergies and without considering that nasal congestion may be a common and expected side effect of psychiatric and other medications. However, antihistamines only eliminate symptoms caused by allergy, a reaction of the body's immune system to certain substances that are noxious to the individual suffering a reaction, but that may be harmless to other people. Also, antihistamines do not actually decrease nasal congestion, the symptom that prompts most individuals to seek treatment, and therefore an unneeded antihistamine may be given along with decongestants like pseudoephedrine to dry secretions.

Most medications cause side effects and antihistamines are not benign medications. The first generation of these medications (Benadryl, Vistaril/hydroxyzine) are in a class of medications

called anticholinergics, medications that disrupt the usual processes of the body and cause, among other side effects, urinary and fluid retention, thick mucus secretions, constipation, agitation, insomnia, drowsiness and impaired thinking. Given that decongestants also cause nervousness, restlessness, and insomnia, caregivers should be concerned about exposure to medications with these side effects.

Antihistamines should be given with caution to any individual who has high blood pressure, glaucoma, stomach ulcers, seizures, lung and thyroid problems. Antihistamines also can cause dizziness when rising from a seated or standing position. In second generation antihistamines like loratadine and fexofenadine, side effects will be lessened, but still present to some degree. Extended release formulations magnify these effects because they take longer to be excreted from the body. The extended release formulations are more likely to cause nervousness, restlessness and insomnia. Also, they interact with antidepressants like Prozac and



Paxil in the SSRI class and should not be given to an individual already taking SSRI's. They also interact with many antifungal drugs.

Overuse of anticholinergic medications can cause a toxic condition known as *central anticholinergic syndrome*, symptoms of which are insomnia, agitation, memory impairment, repetitive picking and grabbing behavior and visual hallucinations. There may also be EEG abnormalities.

When an individual is suffering from allergy-like symptoms, check with the doctor to see if nasal symptoms could be a side effect of other medications before asking the physician to prescribe an antihistamine. Nasal congestion itself can be relieved by applying saline mist, a treatment that is benign. If an individual develops symptoms of insomnia or agitation following a prescription for antihistamines, consult with the primary physician about antihistamine side effects.

[www.drugdigest.or/DD/Comparison](http://www.drugdigest.or/DD/Comparison)  
[www.medicinenet.com/antihistamines-oral](http://www.medicinenet.com/antihistamines-oral)  
[www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com)  
[www.familydoctor.org](http://www.familydoctor.org)



## Philadelphia Coordinated Health Care

123 S. Broad Street ♦ Philadelphia, PA 19109 ♦ 215-546-0300 ♦ fax 215-790-4976

*PCHC is a core program of PMHCC, Inc.*