

Winter Health Tips

Keeping You Healthy This Winter!

Shield Yourself From Germs & Viruses

Winter is prime season for colds, flu, and respiratory issues. You can't stop the bad germs already out there, but you can protect yourself from catching them:

Flu shot

Still the best first-defense against influenza, or "the flu," each season's vaccination is a combination of the antibodies to that year's anticipated virus mix. Influenza is a serious disease that can lead to hospitalization and sometimes even death.

- Administered annually in late fall or early winter
- Flu vaccines cause antibodies to develop in the body about two weeks after vaccination. These antibodies provide protection against infection with the viruses that are in the vaccine.

Stop the germ spread

Avoiding winter's bad germs takes vigilance:

- Wash your hands! Frequently washing hands and using hand sanitizers kills off any contacted germs.
- Sneeze and cough into your elbow, not your hand. This will prevent your spreading germs when you touch things.
- Sanitize work areas and frequently touched items like light switches and door knobs. Carry your own pen.
- If you're sick, stay home from school or work to avoid infecting others and spreading the germs.
- Visit Dulles Urgent Care if you have fever, persistent symptoms, or believe you have the flu.

Boost Your Body

The best defense is often a smart offense. In this case, it's fueling your body to help it fight off winter's harsh effects:

Hydration

Heaters and dry winter air can play havoc with your body causing chapped lips, scratchy skin and dry sinuses.

Protect yourself from winter's dry effects by:

- Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water. In cold weather, avoid alcohol and caffeine as they can cause your body to lose heat more rapidly.
- Moisturize and use lip balms to protect your skin. Vaseline on chapped areas can ease chapped skin pain.
- Run a humidifier indoors. Keep the water reservoir and filter clean and bacteria / mold-free.
- Use a saline nasal spray to keep nasal passages moist.

Nutrition

Maintaining a balanced diet with plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables while avoiding sugar and carb-heavy foods will help stave off winter's bad germs. You can boost your body's resilience by:

- Adding Omega-3 fatty acid supplements (at least 1,000 mg DHA/EPA per day) to improve dry skin.
- Adding a broad-spectrum multivitamin to fill in any nutritional gaps in your diet.
- A daily probiotic will help push out bad bacteria and populate your digestive tract with beneficial flora.
- Supplement with proven immune enhancers such as vitamin D, zinc (30–50 mg daily in supplement form), and vitamin C (a minimum of 1,000 mg per day).

Prevent Frostbite and Hypothermia

Prolonged time spent in cold weather can be hazardous—and potentially deadly—to your health. Bodies lose heat faster in colder temperatures than they can produce it, causing frostbite and hypothermia:

What is frostbite?

- To prevent frostbite, keep all areas of your body covered, especially fingers, ears, nose and chin as they are often the first affected. Complete your protection with layers over your body's core, thick socks, and waterproof boots. Wear goggles to protect the corneas of your eyes from freezing in cold and windy conditions.
- Dressing in warm layers will help trap body heat by forming an insulation layer.
- Early frostbite warning signs include redness or pain in any skin area, numbness, loss of feeling or a stinging sensation. As it progresses red skin turns white or pale and begins to affect all layers of the skin, including the tissues that lie below. Full frostbite presents as white or grayish-yellow skin area, skin that feels unusually firm or waxy, or numbness. Scarily, a victim is often unaware of frostbite until someone else points it out because the frozen tissues are numb.
- Immediately get out of the cold if you suspect frostbite. Slowly warm the affected area — but don't rub it since that can damage your skin.
- Seek medical care if numbness doesn't go away.

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What is hypothermia?

- Hypothermia is caused by prolonged exposures to very cold temperatures, causing your core temperature to drop below 95 degrees. In colder temperatures, your body will lose heat faster than it's produced, eventually lowering your body's temperature.
- Most of your body heat is lost through your skin. Believe it or not but as much as 50 percent of body heat can be lost via your head. Always wear a hat in colder weather!
- While hypothermia is most common at very cold temperatures, it is possible at temperatures above 40° if a person becomes chilled from being wet or an infant is left in a cool room.
- Adult symptoms include: shivering, exhaustion, confusion, fumbling hands, memory loss, slurred speech, and drowsiness.
- In infants: bright red, cold skin and very low energy.
- Seek medical help right away for possible hypothermia.

Activity

Colder weather forces us to spend more time indoors, which can often mean a reduction in activity levels. Since staying healthy often corresponds with staying active, finding ways to exercise in winter months is health-critical:

- There are many indoor exercise options that don't require a gym membership. Walking around a mall, weight training, exercise bands, and more can keep you in shape in colder temperatures.
- If you are at risk of heart attacks or strokes, be careful while active in colder temperatures. Cold weather can act as a vasoconstrictor, which means your blood vessels narrow, cutting down blood flow and forcing your heart to work harder. The number of heart attacks climbs during the winter, according to the American Heart Association.
- If you do exercise outside, dress carefully in warm but shedable layers. Sweating in cold weather can put you at risk for hypothermia. Choose footwear with enough traction to prevent falls, especially if it's icy or snowy.
- If it's dark when you exercise outside, wear reflective clothing and use both headlights and taillights when riding a bike.
- You're not off the hook from sun protection in the winter! Wear a sunscreen that blocks both UVA and UVB rays and a lip balm with sunscreen. Protect your eyes from snow and ice glare with dark glasses or goggles.

Preventing Slips on Snow and Ice

Slippery surfaces are common in colder weather and lead to falls, broken bones, contusions, and concussions. To stay on your feet:

- Prevent slips, trips, and falls by clearing snow and ice from walking surfaces and spread environmentally and animal-friendly deicer as quickly as possible after a storm.
- When walking on snow or ice is unavoidable, take short steps and walk at a slower pace to react quickly to changes in traction.
- Wear footwear that has good traction and insulation (e.g. insulated and water resistant boots or rubber over-shoes with good rubber treads)

Environmental Protection

Cold weather and winter storms often require our using special machinery to turn on the lights or heat our homes. These machines come with their own sets of hazards:

Space heaters

- Space heaters help heat our homes and offices, but are also a major hazard. They are the cause of 2 out of every 5 home fires and account for 84% of home fire deaths.
- Never leave a space heater unattended or left on while you sleep.
- Maintain 3' of clearance around space heater any time it is used. Keep it far away from upholstered furniture, clothing, mattresses, or bedding.
- They easily overload electrical circuits, tripping breakers or causing wires or cords to overheat and catch fire.

Carbon monoxide

- Carbon monoxide is the most common cause of fatal poisonings.
- In homes, carbon monoxide can quickly build up from a poorly vented or malfunctioning heater, furnace, range or any fuel-powered appliance, or even from a car left idling in a garage.
- It's formed during incomplete burning of fuels, such as gasoline, kerosene, natural gas, oil, coal, or wood.
- Always use machinery such as generators, heaters, and snow blowers in well-ventilated areas.

Use Winter to Kick-Off Health Care

Winter months are a perfect time to schedule annual activities such as physicals or health checks. Our Dulles Urgent Care doctors can see you on a walk-in, no waiting bases 7 days a week and we accept most insurance!