



Clinical Update

For Telephone Triage Nurses

January 2008

Page 1 of 2

In this Issue:

- ◆ Frostbite
- ◆ Hypothermia
- ◆ FDA Recommendation regarding OTC Cough and Cold Medicines

Dear Nursing Colleague:

Cold weather has descended upon the country for our call centers in more northern locales.

Thankfully, triage calls for frostbite and hypothermia are relatively rare. Dr. Schmitt and I have provided pediatric and adult versions of two triage guidelines for your use and reference. Please review the content provided in these two guidelines. This health information may be valuable for your patients, your friends, and family.

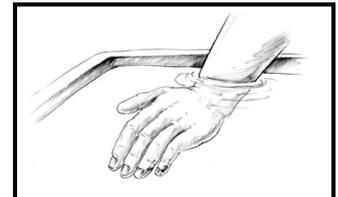
- ◆ Frostbite
- ◆ Cold Injury (Hypothermia)

Regards and keep warm,

David Thompson, MD, FACEP

FIRST AID Advice for Frostbite:

- ◆ Move into a warm room.
- ◆ Rewarm the frostbitten area rapidly with wet heat.
- ◆ **For frostbite of an extremity (e.g., fingers, toes):** Place the frostbitten part in very warm water. A bathtub or sink is often the quickest approach. The water should be very warm (104 to 108 F, or 40 to 42 C), but not hot enough to burn. Immersion in this warm water should continue until a pink flush signals the return of circulation to the frostbitten part (usually 30 minutes).
- ◆ **For frostbite of the face (e.g., ears, nose):** Apply warm wet washcloths to frostbitten area of the face. Continue doing this until a pink flush signals the return of circulation to the frostbitten area (usually 30 minutes).



Place frostbitten fingers in warm water.



A young girl who Dr. Thompson treated in the Emergency Department for first degree frostbite.

Note: Do not rewarm a frostbitten area if there is a chance of refreezing.

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Page 2 of 2

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How should I dress to prevent frostbite and hypothermia?

- **Clothing:** Dress in layers for cold weather. The first layer should be long underwear, preferably made of polypropylene or polyester (wicks moisture away from skin). The middle layer(s) should be fleece or wool. The outer layer serves as a windbreaker and also needs to be waterproof. The layers should be loose, not tight.
- **Hand Protection:** Mittens are warmer than gloves. You may wish to wear a thin glove under the mitten.
- **Footwear:** Avoid tight shoes that might interfere with circulation. Wear 1-2 pairs of socks made from wool or a wool blend. You may also wish to wear a thin liner sock made from polyester or polypropylene (wicks away moisture) under the wool socks.
- **Headwear:** Wear a hat; on cold days over 50% of heat loss occurs from the head if you are not wearing a hat. Be certain to keep your ears covered.

Breaking News: FDA Releases Recommendations

On January 17th, 2008 the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued a Public Health Advisory for parents and caregivers, recommending that over-the-counter (OTC) cough and cold products should not be used to treat infants and children less than 2 years of age because serious and potentially life-threatening side effects can occur from such use. OTC cough and cold products include decongestants, expectorants, antihistamines, and antitussives (cough suppressants) for the treatment of colds.

There are very rare but serious adverse events reported with cough and cold products in children. They include death, convulsions, rapid heart rates, and decreased levels of consciousness.

"The FDA strongly recommends to parents and caregivers that OTC cough and cold medicines not be used for children younger than 2," said Charles Ganley, M.D., director of the FDA's Office of Nonprescription Products. *"These medicines, which treat symptoms and not the underlying condition, have not been shown to be safe or effective in children under 2."*

All of the pediatric telephone triage guidelines are already in compliance with the FDA recommendations. For more information and the full list of the FDA's recommendations, go to: http://www.fda.gov/cder/drug/advisory/cough_cold_2008.htm

References

1. American Heart Association. 2005 Guidelines for Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation and Emergency Cardiovascular Care. Part 10: First Aid.
2. Kelly LF. Pediatric cough and cold preparations. *Pediatr Rev.* 2004;25(4):115-123.
3. CDC. Infant deaths associated with cough and cold medications--two states, 2005. *MMWR.* 2007;56:1-4.

Key Point:: Cough and cold medications should not be used in children under 2 years of age.