GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HYPOTHERMIA, FROSTBITE, AND TRENCH FOOT

**Guidance**
- Encourage staying inside as much as possible, especially for sleeping
- Remind clients about dressing in layers
- Provide/encourage a hat or head covering - this helps decrease heat loss tremendously
- Provide/encourage mittens (warmer than gloves) and scarves
- Encourage client to stay dry as possible-outer wear best if water resistant
- Proper foot wear is hard to get in Seattle; people will need boots shoes and socks

**Additional ways to help**
- Provide clothing as above (clothing bank links: [Seattle](#), [South King County](#), [East and North King County](#))
- Provide high-energy foods such as energy bars, hearty soups/stews with high carbohydrate and protein
- Encourage hydration- limit coffee, provide teas (decaf), water, warmed juices, broth
- Alcohol exacerbates heat loss and does not "warm you up"
- Assist with drying feet and footwear, provide dry socks/shoes.

Get clients warmed up when they come in from the cold.
- Remove wet clothing
- Put on dry clothing
- Provide warm beverages, especially broth, warm Gatorade, juices (helps with restoring electrolytes and hydration)

**HYPOTHERMIA AND FROSTBITE**

Hypothermia is a medical emergency and requires quick medical evaluation. If you notice any of the above signs, or if their temperature is below 95° F, get medical attention immediately!

**Hypothermia** - The signs/symptoms of hypothermia in adults are similar to those of intoxication:
- Confusion
- Slurred speech
- Trouble with coordination
- Slowed response time
- Sleepiness
- Shivering
- Memory loss
- Fumbling hands

If you are not able to get medical help right away, try to warm the person up.
- Get the person into a warm room or shelter.
- Remove any wet clothing.
- Warm the center of the person’s body—chest, neck, head, and groin—using an electric blanket, if available. You can also use skin-to-skin contact, for example putting hands in the armpit area, under loose, dry layers of blankets, clothing, towels, or sheets.
- Warm drinks can help increase body temperature, but do not give alcoholic drinks. Do not try to give beverages to an unconscious person.
- After body temperature has increased, keep the person dry and wrap their body, including their head and neck, in a warm blanket.
- Get the person medical attention as soon as possible.

**Frostbite**
If you detect symptoms of frostbite, seek medical care. People can be unaware of this due to numbness.
- Frost bitten areas may look dusky, dark, waxy, blanched, grayish /whitish
- Skin may feel unusually firm or waxy
- May feel numb or prickly to the person.
If (1) a person shows signs of frostbite, but no signs of hypothermia and (2) immediate medical care is not available, do the following:

- Get the person into a warm room as soon as possible.
- Unless absolutely necessary, do not walk on feet or toes that show signs of frostbite—this increases the damage.
- Do not rub the frostbitten area with snow or massage it. This can cause more damage.
- Put the areas affected by frostbite in warm—not hot—water (the temperature should be comfortable to the touch for unaffected parts of the body).
- If warm water is not available, warm the affected area using body heat. For example, you can use the heat of an armpit to warm frostbitten fingers.
- Do not use a heating pad, heat lamp, or the heat of a stove, fireplace, or radiator for warming. Affected areas are numb and can easily burn.

People at higher risk for hypothermia include those who

- Spend a lot of time outside
- Are under-dressed for weather
- Dependent on alcohol
- Use recreational drug users
- People with poor circulation (e.g. diabetes)
- Other at risk groups include people who are: elderly, malnourished, mentally ill, have an active infection, have mobility problems

**TRENCH FOOT**

Trench foot, also known as immersion foot, occurs when the feet are wet for long periods of time. It can be quite painful, but it can be prevented and treated.

**Symptoms**

- Tingling and/or itching sensation
- Pain, Swelling
- Cold and blotchy skin
- Numbness
- Prickly or heavy feeling in the foot.

The foot may be red, dry, and painful after it becomes warm. Blisters may form, followed by skin and tissue dying and falling off. In severe cases, untreated trench foot can involve the toes, heel, or entire foot.

**Prevention of trench foot**

When possible, air-dry and elevate your feet, and exchange wet shoes and socks for dry ones.

**Treatment**

Treatment for trench foot is similar to the treatment for frostbite. Take the following steps:

- Thoroughly clean and dry your feet.
- Put on clean, dry socks daily.
- Treat the affected part by applying warm packs or soaking in warm water (102° to 110° F) for approximately 5 minutes.
- When sleeping or resting, do not wear socks.
- Obtain medical assistance as soon as possible.

If you have a foot wound, your foot may be more prone to infection. Check your feet at least once a day for infections or worsening of symptoms.

For any questions you can email Jody Rauch, Clinical Quality Lead with Healthcare for the Homeless Network at jody.rauch@kingcounty.gov