



Playing Outside in Winter: Tips to Keep Kids Warm & Safe

Heading outside ([/English/family-life/power-of-play/Pages/playing-outside-why-its-important-for-kids.aspx](#)) for some wintertime fun like sledding, throwing snowballs or ice skating can be a sure-fire cure for cabin fever. It's also a great way for kids to get the 60 minutes of daily exercise ([/English/healthy-living/fitness/StopWatch-Tool/Pages/default.aspx](#)) they need. Just be sure your child is dressed right—and know when it's time to come in and warm up.



Children exposed to extreme cold for too long and without warm, dry, breathable clothing can get frostbite (<https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/staysafe/frostbite.html>) or even life-threatening hypothermia (<https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/winter/staysafe/hypothermia.html>).

Little bodies, big chill

Children are more at risk ([/English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/Cold-Weather-Safety.aspx](#)) from the cold than adults. Because their bodies are smaller, they lose heat more quickly. Especially if they're having fun, they may be less likely to come inside when they're getting too cold.

Frostbite

Frostbite happens when the skin, and sometimes the tissue below it, freezes. Fingers, toes, ears, and noses are most likely to get frostbite. Frostbitten skin may start to hurt or feel like it's burning, then quickly go numb. It may turn white or pale gray and form blisters.

What to do:

- If you suspect frostbite, bring your child indoors to gently warm up. Don't rub the affected area, and don't pop any blisters.
- Avoid placing anything hot directly on the skin. Soak frostbitten areas of the body in warm (not hot) water for 20 to 30 minutes. Warm washcloths can be applied to frostbitten noses, ears and lips.
- After a few minutes, dry and cover your child with blankets. Give them something warm to drink.
- If the pain or numbness continues for more than a few minutes, call your pediatrician.

Hypothermia

When the body's temperature drops below normal from the cold, dangerous hypothermia begins to set in. A child may start shivering, a sign the body is trying to warm itself up, but then become sluggish, clumsy, or slur his words.

What to do:

Hypothermia is a medical emergency, so call 911 right away.

- Until help arrives, bring your child indoors. Remove any wet clothing, which draws heat away from the body.
- Wrap your child in blankets or warm clothes, and give her something warm to drink. Be sure to cover core body areas like the chest and abdomen.

your child stops breathing or loses a pulse, give mouth-to-mouth resuscitation or CPR.

Preventing frostbite and hypothermia

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Frostbite and hypothermia are different conditions, but some wintertime planning and safety (</English/news/Pages/Winter-Safety.aspx>) steps can help protect your child from both:

Check the wind chill

In general, playing outside in temperatures or wind chills below -15° Fahrenheit should be avoided. At these temperatures, exposed skin begins to freeze within minutes.

What to wear

Several thin layers will help keep kids warm and dry. Insulated boots, mittens or gloves, and a hat are essential. Make sure children change out of any wet clothes right away.

Take breaks

Set reasonable limits on the amount of time spent playing outside to prevent hypothermia and frostbite. Make sure kids have a place to go for regular indoor breaks to warm up.

Tips to stay safe during winter sports & activities

Ice skating

- Allow children to skate only on approved surfaces. Check for signs posted by local police or recreation departments, or call your local police department to find out which areas have been approved.
- Advise your child to:
 - Skate in the same direction as the crowd
 - Avoid darting across the ice
 - Never skate alone
 - Not chew gum or eat candy while skating
 - Consider having your child wear a helmet (</English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/bicycling-and-beyond-when-your-kids-should-wear-helmets.aspx>), knee pads and elbow pads, especially while learning to skate (</English/healthy-living/sports/Pages/Figure-Skating.aspx>) to keep them safe.

Sledding

- Keep sledders away from motor vehicles.
- Children should be supervised while sledding.
- Keep young children separated from older children.
- Sledding feet first or sitting up, instead of lying down head-first, may prevent head injuries.
- Consider having your child wear a helmet (</English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/bicycling-and-beyond-when-your-kids-should-wear-helmets.aspx>) while sledding.
- Use steerable sleds, not snow disks or inner tubes.
- Sleds should be structurally sound and free of sharp edges and splinters, and the steering mechanism should be well lubricated.
- Sled slopes should be free of obstructions like trees or fences, be covered in snow (not ice), not be too steep (slope of less than 30°), and end with a flat runoff.
- Avoid sledding in crowded areas.

❄️ Snow skiing and snowboarding

Children should be taught to ski or snowboard (</English/healthy-living/sports/Pages/Skiing-and-Snowboarding.aspx>) by a qualified instructor in a program designed for children.

- Never ski or snowboard alone.
- Young children should always be supervised by an adult. Older children's need for adult supervision depends on their maturity and skill. If older children are not with an adult, they should always at least be accompanied by a friend.
- All skiers and snowboarders should wear helmets (</English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/bicycling-and-beyond-when-your-kids-should-wear-helmets.aspx>). Ski facilities should require helmet use, but if they do not, parents should enforce the requirement for their children.
- Equipment should fit the child. Skiers should wear safety bindings that are adjusted at least every year. Snowboarders should wear gloves with built-in wrist guards. Eye protection or goggles should also be used.
- Slopes should fit the ability and experience of the skier or snowboarder. Avoid crowded slopes.
- Avoid skiing in areas with trees and other obstacles.

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Snowmobiling

- The AAP recommends that children under age 16 not operate snowmobiles and that children under age 6 never ride on snowmobiles.
- Do not use a snowmobile to pull a sled or skiers.
- Wear goggles and a safety helmet (</English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/bicycling-and-beyond-when-your-kids-should-wear-helmets.aspx>) approved for use on motorized vehicles like motorcycles.
- Travel at safe speeds.
- Never snowmobile alone or at night.
- Stay on marked trails, away from roads, water, railroads and pedestrians.

More information

- Cold Weather Safety for Children (</English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/Cold-Weather-Safety.aspx>)
- Winter Car Seat Safety Tips (</English/safety-prevention/on-the-go/Pages/Winter-Car-Seat-Safety-Tips.aspx>)
- Ask the pediatrician: What is the safest way to keep my family warm when the power goes out? (</English/tips-tools/ask-the-pediatrician/Pages/warm-when-the-power-goes-out.aspx>)
- Playing Outside: Why It's So Important for Kids (</English/family-life/power-of-play/Pages/playing-outside-why-its-important-for-kids.aspx>)
- Bike Riding and Beyond: 5 Times Your Kids Should Wear Helmets (</English/safety-prevention/at-play/Pages/bicycling-and-beyond-when-your-kids-should-wear-helmets.aspx>)

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