

Winter safety tips for parents and children



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Winter is an exciting time for kids. It brings great outdoor activities, such as snowboarding and skating, but also cold weather, ice and snow, which can present a danger to children. But that doesn't mean they can't enjoy the winter. Here are some winter safety tips for both parents and children.

In general:

- Never allow children to play outside alone. Establish a buddy system with one or more of their friends and have them look out for one another. Children younger than eight years of age should always be well supervised outside.
- Check from time to time to make sure children are warm and dry.
- Have younger children take frequent breaks to come inside for a warm drink.
- Never send children outside in extreme weather conditions such as snowstorms.
- Keep children indoors if the temperature falls below -25°C , or if the wind chill is -28°C or greater.
- Tell children not to put their tongues on cold metal. It may sound silly, but some kids still do it.
- Advise children to stay away from snowplows and snowblowers.
- Help children choose play areas with a warm shelter nearby such as a friend's home.
- Advise children to play in an area away from roads, fences and water.
- Apply sunscreen to exposed skin, even when it's cloudy.

Clothing:

- Dress children in several layers of clothing. If they get too warm, they can remove one layer at a time.
- Always remove children's wet clothing and boots immediately.
- Make sure children wear a hat because most body heat is lost through the head.
- Have children keep their ears covered at all times to prevent frostbite.

- Have children wear mittens instead of gloves.
- Dress children in warm, waterproof boots that are roomy enough to wiggle their toes around.
- Remove all drawstrings from children's clothing to prevent strangulation. Use velcro or other fasteners instead, and use a neck warmer instead of a scarf.

Skating

- Make sure children always wear a hockey or ski helmet while skating.
- Make sure children's skates are comfortable, with good ankle support, to avoid twists, sprains or breaks.
- When possible, have children skate on public indoor or outdoor rinks. If this is not possible, children should remember to:
 - Obey all signs posted on or near the ice. Yellow signs usually mean skate with caution, and red usually means no skating allowed.
 - Make sure they are always supervised on the ice.
 - Never assume it's safe to skate on a lake or pond. An adult should make sure the ice is at least 10 cm (four inches) thick, and check with local weather authorities for information about ice thickness.
 - Avoid walking on ice near moving water. Ice formed on moving water, such as rivers and creeks, will vary in thickness and is highly unpredictable.

Skiing/snowboarding*

Children should:

- Take lessons from a qualified skiing or snowboarding instructor.
- Never ski or snowboard alone.
- With parents, check equipment every year for fit and maintenance. Bindings should be checked annually by a qualified technician.
- Make sure they're in control of their speed. Many injuries result from a loss of control. Stunts and fatigue also lead to injuries.
- Always wear a helmet with side vents that allow them to hear.

A Note From the Doctor

- When snowboarding, wear wrist guards to reduce the risk of wrist injury.
- Dress safely. Wear brightly-coloured clothing, and warm hats and mittens.
- Avoid icy hills. The risk of falls and injuries increases in icy conditions.
- Watch out for other skiers and snowboarders, as well as any other obstacles, on the slopes.
- Stay in designated areas and on marked trails.
- * With lessons from a certified instructor, it's okay for younger children to snowboard; however, their coordination is not fully developed until age 10 years.

Sledding

Children should:

- Always wear either a ski or hockey helmet – not a bicycle helmet – while sledding.
- Never use a sled with sharp or jagged edges.
- Make sure the handholds on the sled are secure.
- Always sit up or kneel on a sled. Lying down increases the risk of head, spine and abdominal injuries.
- Never sled on or near roadways.
- Look for shallow slopes that are free of trees, fences or any other obstacles.

- Avoid sledding on crowded slopes.

Snow forts and snow banks

Children should NOT:

- Build snow forts or make tunnels. They may collapse and suffocate a child.
- Play in or on snow banks. The driver of a snowplow or other vehicle may not see a child.

Snowballs

Children should NOT throw snowballs. Snowball fights can lead to injuries, especially to the eyes. Snowballs are more dangerous if the snow is hard-packed or contains a rock or some other hard object.

Snowmobiles

- Children and adults should wear an approved helmet at all times. Head injuries are the leading cause of snowmobile-related deaths.
- Children younger than five years of age should never ride on a snowmobile, even with an adult.
- Children younger than 16 years of age should not operate a snowmobile.
- Anyone operating a snowmobile should take a formal safety training program.
- Never tow a child behind a snowmobile on a tube, tire, sled or saucer.

This information should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your physician. There may be variations in treatment that your physician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

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