A\s the cold winter weather approaches we need to be aware of the signs and symptoms of hypothermia. Hypothermia occurs when the body is exposed to cold temperatures and the body loses heat faster than the body can generate heat to stay warm. A normal body temperature ranges from 97.5°F to 99.6°F. Your overall body temperature can drop to low levels quickly when exposed to cold temperatures. Although everyone is at risk for hypothermia, young children and older adults are especially at risk when exposed to cold temperatures.

It is important to know the signs and symptoms of hypothermia. Early symptoms include:
- Cold, pale or blue-gray skin
- Shivering
- Lack of interest or concern (apathy)
- Mild unsteadiness in balance or walking
- Poor judgment
- Slurred speech; and
- Numb hands and fingers and difficulty performing tasks.

The late symptoms of hypothermia include:
- Muscle stiffness
- Slow pulse
- Breathing becomes shallow and slower
- Trunk of the body is cold to the touch
- Weakness and sleepiness
- Confusion
- Loss of consciousness; and
- Shivering, which may stop if body temperature drops below 90°F.

Hypothermia is a serious condition that can even result in death. Recognizing the signs and symptoms of hypothermia and getting treatment quickly is key. If someone begins to shiver violently, stumble, or can’t respond to questions, suspect hypothermia and warm him or her quickly. Treatment for mild hypothermia includes getting out of the cold and using warm blankets, heaters and warm fluids to regain body temperature. Never use any heating element that would burn the skin or body. Moderate to severe hypothermia is treated in the hospital setting.

Hypothermia can happen quickly so it is important to recognize when symptoms occur, so that you can keep yourself and your loved ones safe this winter.

If you have a question about hypothermia call your primary care provider or Elliot Direct at 603-663-1111.

For additional information on available resources to stay warm this winter, including fuel assistance, you can call ServiceLink at 603-644-2240.