

Cold-Related Illnesses

Public Health Brief



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Overview

Cold-related illnesses range from mild conditions, such as Chilblains (itchy, red, swollen patches on fingers, toes, ears, or nose), to life-threatening conditions, including Hypothermia and Frostbite. Prolonged exposure to cold temperatures can cause symptoms such as numbness, shivering, loss of coordination, skin redness, and reduced blood flow to hands and feet, which may result in permanent damage to the body or even death.¹

The Maryland Department of Health (MDH) conducts weekly surveillance during the winter season to monitor cold-related illnesses. These conditions continue to put a strain on Emergency Departments (EDs) and Urgent Care Centers (UCs).²

Protective Actions³

There are many ways to protect yourself from Cold-related illnesses, such as:

- Cover exposed skin by wearing warm clothing, including an insulated coat, mittens, boots, and a hat.
- Stay dry by changing wet or sweaty clothing promptly to prevent heat loss.
- Prepare your vehicle for winter travel by keeping an emergency kit with jumper cables, warm clothes, a flashlight, blankets, and a portable phone charger.
- Winterize your home by sealing drafts, insulating pipes, and checking heating systems regularly.

COLD-RELATED ILLNESSES DATA²

Cold-Related ED/UC Visits, Harford, Maryland

Number of ED/UC visits:
 2024/25 - 60
 2023/24 - 40
 2022/23 - 30

Cold-Related Deaths by Incident, Harford, Maryland

Number of Cold Related Deaths by incident:
 2024/2025 - 2
 2023/24 - 1
 2022/23 - 2

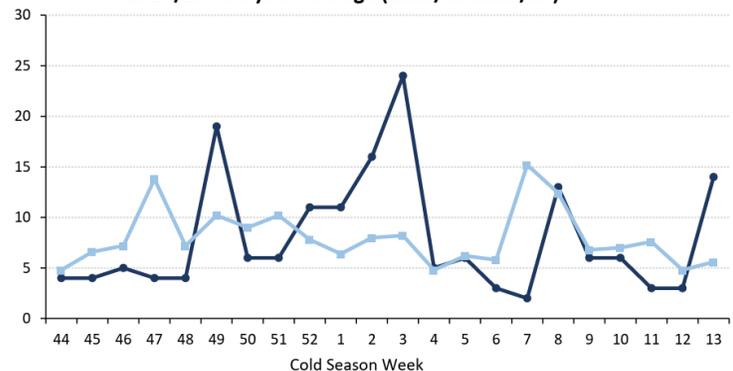
Spotlight: Carbon Monoxide Poisoning⁴

As temperatures drop during the winter months, the use of heat in homes and vehicles increases. Carbon Monoxide (CO) is an odorless and colorless poisonous gas produced by fuel-burning appliances such as generators, gas heaters, stoves, and motor vehicles. Because CO has no detectable color or odor, there is an increased risk of unintentional poisoning.

Prevention⁵

- Install Carbon Monoxide detectors in homes
- Do not leave vehicles running in enclosed spaces such as garages, even if windows or doors are open.
- Do not operate generators indoors or in partially enclosed spaces.
- Do not use gas stoves or ovens for heating.
- Ensure proper ventilation for all fuel-burning appliances and do not block chimneys or vents.

CO Exposure ED/UC Visits by Cold Season Week, Maryland, 2024/25 vs 5 year Average (2019/20-2023/24)



In Maryland, the total number of Carbon Monoxide exposure related visits decreased to 175 during the 2024/2025 season, compared to 205 visits in 2023/2024.²

Sources:

1. Cold-Related Illnesses. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/cold-stress/about/related-illness.html>
 2. County Statistics. Maryland Department of Health 2024/2025 Cold-Related Illness Surveillance Summary Report
 3. 3 Ways to Stay Safe and Warm This Winter. Federal Emergency Management Agency <https://www.fema.gov/blog/3-ways-stay-safe-and-warm-winter>
 4. How to Stay Safe from Carbon Monoxide Poisoning. American Lung Association <https://www.lung.org/blog/carbon-monoxide-poisoning-safety>
 5. Carbon Monoxide Poisoning: Symptoms and Causes. Mayo Clinic <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/carbon-monoxide/symptoms-causes>