

Your Health

by Dr. Paul Roumeliotis

Winter Safety for All!

Winter can be lots of fun for young and old! However, there are some associated potential dangers. Year after year, emergency departments see a high number of winter-related injuries, many of which are preventable. Winter activities can be part of a healthy lifestyle as long as we play it safe. Here are some facts and tips to help ensure a safe winter for the whole family:

- To avoid frostbite during cold weather, make sure that your or your child's clothing, shoes, boots and gloves stay dry. If any of these items get wet, change into dry ones.
- Make sure that children do not play in snow that is piled up for clearing on the street or sidewalks. Tragically, children have been killed by snow cleaning equipment or snow collapsing on them while playing in these banks.
- As the winter ice and snow melts, it may fall from a roof or side of a home or building and injure someone seriously. Make sure that your home or building is free of this hazard.
- Whenever sledding or tobogganing, sliding on or into a road should not be allowed. Additionally, go down shallow slopes free of obstacles such as trees. Avoid sliding down a crowded slope.
- Most winter sport injuries involve twists, sprains and strains. These injuries can be prevented (for example, during skiing and skating) by getting good instructors, proper equipment and of course appropriate supervision.
- Helmets have become part of the regular or standard equipment or attire in sports such as biking, hockey, inline skating, baseball and football, to name a few. They should also become a regular habit in winter sports or activities that can potentially cause life-threatening head injuries such as tobogganing and skiing.
- Snowmobiling is particularly risky for children and young adults. For safety reasons, children less than 6 years of age should never ride as passengers on snowmobiles. Also, only children older than 16 years of age should drive snowmobiles. Of course, drivers and passengers should always wear the proper protective equipment (including an approved helmet) and drive carefully.
- Frozen ponds or lakes make for great skating. Make sure, however, that the ice is thick enough before you let your children walk, play or skate on such frozen surfaces.
- Fireplaces are fun, warm and cozy but should be used safely; always use a screen to prevent sparks from igniting items around the fireplace such as newspapers, carpets, furniture and curtains. Only use the fireplace when you're at home and awake.
- You should install carbon monoxide detectors in your home if your heating system uses fuel such as oil or gas.
- Never leave children in a running parked car, especially during the winter; the snow can block the car exhaust pipe, resulting in carbon monoxide poisoning, which can be deadly.
- To avoid falls and slips, make sure your walk-way and stairway are clear of ice and snow.

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