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Public health warns of cold injuries

Hastings Prince Edward Public Health]recommends that people take precautions to prevent cold injuries such as frostbite and hypothermia during cold spells, says senior public health inspector for public health John Cannan.

Following a double dose of extreme cold weather warnings for the area early in 2018, *Bancroft This Week* reached out to public health to learn the warning signs you're too cold and how to protect yourself.

?Frostbite, the early signs include pink or reddish areas which may feel numb,? said Cannan. ?As frostbite progresses the areas will become white and waxy in appearance.?

If you suspect you have frostbite you should get inside and use your own body heat to warm your affected areas, he said.

?[The area] should not be rubbed,? he said. ?Put your hands in your armpits, [for example.] Have your own body heat it up, don't try to rub against clothing or anything like that because it can actually cause more damage.?

?It's always nice to warm up by the fire but warm up with your own body heat more or less because it's a more gradual process than trying to hold on to something really hot. You may not feel the quick effect of the heat because your hands are slightly numb. You can actually burn yourself.?

Cannan said frostbite can happen in minutes, depending on the temperature. It's important to make sure you don't have an exposed skin and avoid strenuous exercise in the cold.

Other tips from public health included avoiding caffeine or alcohol but drinking warm fluids. He said caffeine and alcohol cause blood to flow to your outer extremities and make you think you're warm when you might not be. He also recommended layering up.

?As you warm up you can take off an outer layer and maintain your body temperature without sweating. Obviously you don't want to start sweating but you have to dress in loose or layers that aren't going to restrict blood flow. Sweating causes you to lose body heat faster,? said Cannan.

As for hypothermia, Cannan said it happens when the body looses heat faster than your body can produce.

?It can effect brain and muscle functions,? he said. ?It can be dangerous because the person may not be aware it's happening and may not understand corrective actions.?

He listed stumbling or mumbling as possible symptoms as your body begins to shut down without enough heat to operate correctly.

?The effected person should be moved into a warm location. Any wet clothing [should be] removed. They should be covered with several layers of blankets.?

Cannan said that if either condition is severe the effected person should be taken to hospital.