

## **Quick Tips for Shelter Providers/ Outreach Staff for Keeping People Warm in Cold Weather**

(as adapted from the Health Care for the Homeless Network, Public Health – Seattle & King County 11/24/10)

**IMPORTANT: If you think someone may have hypothermia or frostbite, immediately refer him/her for medical evaluation.**

### **General guidance**

- Encourage staying inside as much as possible, especially for sleeping
- Remind clients about dressing in layers
- Provide/encourage a hat or head covering – this helps decrease heat loss tremendously
- Provide/encourage mittens (warmer than gloves) and scarves
- Encourage client to stay as dry as possible – outer wear is best if it is water-resistant
- Provide/encourage proper foot wear such as boots, shoes and socks

### **Additional ways to help**

- Provide clothing (see list above)
- Provide high-energy foods such as energy bars
- Provide hearty soups and stews with high carbohydrate and protein
- Encourage hydration –provide teas, particularly decaf, water, warmed juices, broth, (limit coffee),
- Alcohol exacerbates heat loss. Alcohol does not “warm people up.”
- Assist with drying feet, provide dry socks/shoes

### **Most people who come in from the cold will respond to the following:**

- Remove wet clothing
- Put on dry clothing
- Provide warm beverages, especially broth, warm Gatorade, juices (helps with restoring electrolytes and hydration)
- If people begin to develop any of the symptoms below they should be referred for medical evaluation

## **Recognizing and Dealing with Hypothermia and Frostbite:**

### **Hypothermia and Frostbite**

People at higher risk for hypothermia include persons who:

- Spend a lot of time outside
- Are under-dressed for weather
- Dependent on alcohol
- Use recreational drug users
- Have diabetes
- Are elderly
- Are malnourished
- Are mentally ill
- Have an active infection
- Have mobility problems

The signs and symptoms of **hypothermia** are similar to those of intoxication:

- Confusion
- Slurred speech
- Trouble with coordination
- Slowed response time
- Sleepiness
- People are also likely to be shivering

Signs and symptoms of **frostbite**:

- Frost bitten areas may look dusky, dark
- Immersion foot may look waxy, blanched, grayish /whitish and may feel numb or prickly to the person.

**If signs of hypothermia or frostbite are present, immediately refer people for medical evaluation**

While they are waiting to be transferred provide:

- Warm, dry clothing/covering
- Warm, not hot, liquids
- Avoid direct exposure to heaters or attempts to rapidly warm the person up as this can make things worse.

