



4905 Ruf Ave. Fort Rucker, AL 36362-5363
Comm. (334) 255-3770 Fax (334) 255-2609
<https://safety.army.mil>

READY ...OR NOT?

Cold weather injuries are preventable

David San Miguel
Directorate of Communication and Public Affairs
U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center

With cooler temperatures approaching, the U.S. Army Combat Readiness Center is advising Soldiers to anticipate and mitigate their risk of cold weather injury, whether they're deployed, participating in field training exercises or enjoying recreational time off with family and friends.

It's a tall order, and one that might extend beyond the individual Soldier's purview.

The Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center reports cold weather injuries are largely a result of Soldiers being exposed to cold and wet environments while unable to be physically active, find warm shelter, or change wet or damp clothing because of training or mission requirements.

In an October 2014 medical surveillance report published by the AFHSC, this operational environment resulted in 719 cold weather injuries among active and Reserve component service members from July 2013 through June 2014, the highest in the past five cold seasons (2009-2014). The Army accounted for 62 percent, or 446, of those injuries.

Despite these findings, there are preventive measures individuals can take to mitigate their risk for cold weather injury. The USACRC website lists pre-mission planning, knowing the weather forecast and application of the risk management process as integral to prevention.

Leaders at all levels should implement training on appropriate cold weather gear and ensure their Soldiers receive adequate food, water and rest. Soldiers should use the buddy system to monitor health and performance and report to the unit medic or medical officer any signs or symptoms of injury. They should also refrain from alcohol and tobacco use during cold weather.

Some prevalent cold weather injuries include frostbite, hypothermia, chilblain and immersion (trench) foot. Frostbite accounts for the largest number of cold weather injuries each year and occurs when the ambient temperature drops below 28-30 degrees F. It most commonly affects exposed extremities such as the nose, ears, cheeks, hands and feet due to reduced skin blood flow.

Hypothermia, the most serious cold weather injury, occurs when body temperature drops below 95 degrees F. It can occur suddenly, including during partial or total immersion in cold water, or over hours or days, such as during extended operations or survival situations. Immediate medical attention is necessary for any Soldier showing signs of hypothermia.

For more information on cold weather injury, visit <https://safety.army.mil>.