



澳門特別行政區政府  
社會工作局  
GOVERNO DA RAEM  
INSTITUTO DE ACÇÃO SOCIAL

## Residential Facilities Guidelines for handling hypothermia

Hypothermia often occurs during November to March of the following year in regions of mild climate where a sudden fall in temperature is not uncommon during winter days. The usual victims are men, aged 65 or above, living alone and in a state of impoverishment and homeless people. Other risk factors associated to the development of hypothermia include chronic illness (e.g. heart diseases, diabetes, mobility impairments and mental abnormality), traumas, infections, use of alcohol and specific drugs, drug abuse and wetness of body.

As to prompt residential facilities and their staff into taking appropriate measures to prevent their service users against hypothermia, the Social Welfare Bureau suggested them to take reference from the “Important Notes on Prevention against a Decrease in Body Temperature and Hypothermia” (please refer to the attachment(s) for details) once the air temperature of Macao drops to 12°C or below. It aims to assess the health condition of service users and identify high-risk persons in time before any of them develop hypothermia.

### **Common symptoms of hypothermia:**

- The temperature of human body drops to 35.0 °C or below (rectal, ear or infrared thermometry is recommended). Note: when the victim develops symptoms of hypothermia, axillary and other kinds of thermometry are not recommended to use.
- The victim feels cold and his/her skin, hands and feet suffer intense coldness.
- The victim feels fatigue and face turns pale. Clouding of consciousness, slurred speech, stumbling pace and uncontrollable shivering followed. (Note: some victims might not shiver as they had already lost their ability to do so).

### **Following symptoms appear as the body temperature of the victim continues to fall:**

- Muscle stiffness, heart rate slows down and a progressive loss of consciousness.
- If the body temperature keeps on falling, the blood pressure of

the victim begins to decrease, cardiac dysrhythmia develops, falls into coma and could cause the heart to stop beating.

**In case any service users are found to suffer from the aforementioned symptoms, the staff has to monitor them closely and take following actions immediately to safeguard their well-being:**

- Take the victim away from the cold environment at once and settle him/her in a warm surrounding (preferably at a room temperature of 16°C or above). Assist the victim with care in case he/she has mobility problem.
- Place the victim on a warm bed and cover him/her with blankets to facilitate progressive rise of body temperature.
- Keep the victim' s head and body dry. If his/her body or head is wet, dry it before giving him/her dry and warm clothing to wear, like down jacket, cotton-padded jacket, woolen sweater, hat, scarf and socks.
- If the victim is still conscious, offer him/her some high-calorie hot drinks that are easily absorbable by the body (e.g. hot chocolate milk) or some food.
- In case the body temperature of the victim continues to drop or symptoms of muscle stiffness, slow-down of heart rate, progressive loss of consciousness and coma developed, send the victim to hospital for medical attention immediately. (Police hotline: 999; Fire Service: 28572222)
- Upon calling the Police, it is necessary to tell them the present condition and developed symptoms of the victim, like the body temperature and state of consciousness (conscious, confused or in a coma) and his/her particulars (age, gender, address and telephone number) so that the relevant Authorities can be well-prepared for the situation.

**Staff must NOT take the following actions:**

- Offer the victim alcoholic drinks since alcohol increases dissipation of body heat.
- Help the victim to take a hot bath or try to rub his/her hands and feet for a rapid rise in temperature of the limbs and skin would cause the blood to flow instantly to the limbs and bring about a drop in the core temperature and blood pressure, which could be fatal.