

# CIRCULAR



## DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Subject  
**Hypothermia Guidelines**

Series	Number
07	10

Effective Date  
**December 24, 2007**

Related to:  
**GO-OPS-204.07 (Provisions for Homeless Persons During Periods of Cold Weather)**  
Rescinds:  
**TT #10-057-07 (Hypothermia Prevention Program) dated October 11, 2007**

### I. BACKGROUND

Hypothermia is defined as the abnormally low temperature of the body. A number of individuals die each winter due to hypothermia. These individuals are usually homeless and out in cold weather when they become ill.

In the District of Columbia, the Hypothermia Prevention Program has been established to address this situation. Hypothermia season began October 31, 2007 and continues through March 31, 2008. The Hypothermia Prevention Program goes into effect whenever the temperature or the wind chill factor falls below 32 degrees.

During this time, the Hypothermia Alert Hotline will be staffed 24 hours a day. Department of Human Services (DHS) vans will be dispatched to assist with homeless persons who may be at risk of hypothermia. The Hypothermia Alert Hotline can be reached at (202) 399-7093. Members who locate and transport individuals suffering from hypothermia shall notify the Synchronized Operations Command Center (SOCC) of whether it is a voluntary or forcible transport or arrest.

### II. ASSESSING HYPOTHERMIA SYMPTOMS

When assessing whether an individual is suffering from or at risk of hypothermia, members shall look for factors such as being out in the cold without proper clothing or other covering and whether the individual's clothing is wet, which can contribute to hypothermia. Members shall also look for the following symptoms (in order of seriousness):

1. Shivering or trembling;
2. Skin discoloration;
3. Confusion or forgetfulness;
4. Slurred speech/difficulty walking;
5. Sleepiness (hard to wake up);
6. Bizarre behavior;
7. Slow or erratic breathing;
8. Weak pulse; or
9. Loss of consciousness.

**III. WHAT TO DO IF A MEMBER SUSPECTS HYPOTHERMIA**

If a member encounters a situation where he/she suspects an individual is in danger due to hypothermia, the member shall immediately call for an ambulance and remain on the scene until emergency medical service personnel arrive. If it is determined that the individual does not require medical attention, the member shall contact the Communications Division dispatcher and request a DHS van to be summoned to the scene. Indicate to the dispatcher that there is no need for emergency medical assistance, and provide a description of the person, along with their name, if available, and the location to the dispatcher. Members are not to remain on the scene waiting for the DHS van to arrive unless circumstances dictate that the member's presence is required.

//SIGNED//  
Cathy L. Lanier  
Chief of Police

CLL:JAE:CWS:DEP:pas