

Topic:

Hypothermia

QC-0503

Resource:

[Critical Temps](#)

Basics: Hypothermia or low body core temperature typically results from exposure to the elements. It is especially dangerous upon physical immersion in cold water since heat loss occurs rapidly. Recognizing symptoms is critical as even a mild case could impact your paddling ability and affect your group. Due to other cold water effects you may have only minutes to perform a rescue in the event of a capsized.

Question: *When are paddlers most likely to encounter hypothermia?*

Answer: Hypothermia can occur year round but proceeds faster in cold water or windy conditions. Winter and spring water temperatures are cold in our area, and prevail year round in northern locations. It is a special risk on warm early spring days when paddlers tend to dress for the air temperature but the water is still very cold. Prolonged exposure to even mild conditions for children and certain adults are special risk conditions.

Question: *What kinds of clothing are best to avoid hypothermia?*

Answer: Outdoorsmen say "cotton kills" because it holds moisture next to the skin drawing heat out of the body. Wool or synthetic fibers that "wick" are better choices for underclothing. Commercial paddling gear such as paddle jackets, wet suits or dry suits offer great protection from spray, rain, wind chill and immersion.

Advanced Concepts: You may want to get more information on the following:

- How does one choose a wetsuit or a drysuit?
- What are the pro's and con's of poggies?
- At what water temperatures does protection become critical?
- What special group considerations apply for cold water conditions?

For more information contact

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