

Cold Injury Scenarios

In each of the following scenarios I assume that there is a small first aid kit available containing medic's shears (heavy duty scissors), battle dressings, triangular bandages, gauze squares, cling gauze rolls and splinting material. Someone, just for good measure, has tossed in some instant hand warmers, a couple of silver emergency blankets and a few packets of instant broth. Everyone is carrying a full thermos of hot water. You have comms with range control.

1. It is -10°C on a sunny Saturday morning just after 1130. Everyone has had a good night's sleep in the shacks after arriving on the bus early Friday evening. You've all been to the dining hall at 0630 and have had a good breakfast. Now you're out at a remote location on the range pulling a fully loaded sled. Everyone has their rucksack with them as the section will not be returning to the shacks until late on Sunday.

One of your section members, a corporal, walks out on a frozen section of river to check how thick the ice is. You hear a sharp crack as the ice gives way and you watch as he drops, ever so gently, into the cold water. He prevents himself from sinking into the river by placing his arms on the ice and remains calm. Other members of your section are able to find a branch and rescue him after he has spent about five minutes in the icy water. You notice he entirely soaked from his head to his toes and he is shivering violently. You ask him a couple of questions and he responds normally. What do you do?
2. You've been outside snowshoeing for a couple of hours when a member of your section tells you that there is a problem. A young private, just off his BMQ course, has lost one of his mitts. He's been afraid to tell anyone and decided just to keep going, he'll worry about the lost mitt later. You notice his fingers are white and waxy and he complains of pain and numbness. He can't bend his fingers. The temperature is -15°C and there is a gentle wind blowing. You ask him how long his mitt has been gone and he says he doesn't really know. He answers your questions clearly but you notice some anxiety in his voice. You're about 500m from a road and it will take at least 30 minutes for a vehicle to reach your location. What do you do?
3. You and another member of your section are part of an exercise in the Canadian north. For the past week you've been manning a static position, living in an arctic tent. It has been cold with temperatures between +3°C and -5°C with scattered snow flurries and some light rain. The area is rocky and open without any trees or other cover. Food consists of IMPs, but due to a mix up all of the IMPs you have are lunches. You have plenty of clean drinking water. Your stove works but you're running low on naphtha so many of your meals are eaten cold.

Your buddy has been complaining about the food for the past few days and hasn't been eating or drinking on a regular basis. He hasn't been sleeping very well either, getting up several times during the night. Now you notice that he is shivering quite a bit. On his way back to the tent from your position he has stumbled and fallen for the fourth time today (and it's only noon). He complains of a sore wrist. When you examine his hand you see redness and a slight swelling but he can move his hand normally. As you question him about his wrist he mumbles something unintelligible. As you bend forward to listen to him you notice his cheeks and eyes are sunken. He continues to mumble but you can't make out all of what he is saying. What do you do?
4. Your section is crossing a wide, fast moving river, clogged with ice and debris (mainly logs and branches). Just ahead of you, a female corporal slips on the log she is standing on and falls into the river. Immediately she is swept under the ice and debris where she lodges, face up in the water. You can hear her calling out from where she has been trapped. One member scrambles down the debris and grabs the edge of her parka hood, holding her face out of the water so she can breathe. Other members of your section come to her aid but are unable to pull her out due to the strength of the current and the cold water. Using axes, saws and shovels they work for over an hour to free her. When she is finally pulled out of the water she is unconscious, pale and stiff. Both the carotid (neck) and radial (wrist) pulses appear absent and no signs of breathing can be detected. Her pupils are fully dilated. The section commander says that no one can survive that long in freezing water, she is clearly dead and there is no point in wasting time with further resuscitation efforts. What do you do?