



UNIT RESOURCES

WINTER ACTIVITIES

Winter weather does not mean your outdoor program should shut down until more temperate weather arrives in the spring. Winter weather provides our Scouts with ample opportunities for fun and new experiences. However, outdoor winter activities create more challenges for unit leaders to work through to stage a rewarding and **safe** event. This document is intended to guide you to the resources you need.

Guidance for programming a fun and safe winter activity can be summarized in two acronyms:

COLD and **SAFE**.

C.O.L.D.

Keeping warm is the most important part of cold-weather camping and outdoor activities. Use the “C-O-L-D” method to stay warm.

- **C=Clean:** Since insulation is only effective when heat is trapped by dead air spaces, keep your insulating layers clean and fluffy. Dirt, grime, and perspiration can mat down those air spaces and reduce the warmth of a garment.
- **O=Overheating:** Avoid overheating by adjusting the layers of your clothing to meet the outside temperature and the exertions of your activities. Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water, and refrain from drinking caffeinated drinks that act as diuretics.
- **L=Loose layers:** A steady flow of warm blood is essential to keeping all parts of your body heated. Wear several loosely fitting layers of clothing and footgear that will allow maximum insulation without impeding your circulation. Having clothing that is brightly colored (orange or red) is also a good idea, so hunters and sportsmen can see you in snowy conditions. Always have a hat and wear it.
- **D=Dry:** Sweaty, damp clothing and skin can cause your body to cool quickly, possibly leading to frostnip and hypothermia. Keep dry by avoiding clothes that absorb moisture. Always brush away snow on your clothes before you enter a heated area. Keep clothing around your neck loosened so that body heat and moisture can escape instead of soaking through your layers.

SOURCE: The above information was taken directly from the BSA Website page titled *Winter Activity Safety* at <https://www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/safety-moments/winter-activity/> on December 27, 2023.

S.A.F.E.

- **S**helter
- **A**wareness
- **F**itness
- **E**quipment

Priorities are ATTITUDE, SHELTER, WATER, FIRE and FOOD.

AWARENESS of the location, possible weather conditions, your abilities, the limitation of your equipment etc. is required before you leave.

Clothing

- Clothing worn to an event is part of your shelter.
- Do not overdress to the extent you sweat - same as getting wet.
- Dress in layers
- The inner wicking layer takes sweat away from the body, typically synthetic material or silk or wool, NOT cotton.
Wonder of wool, pleasure of polyester, curse of cotton
- Insulating layer, multiple layers of shirts/sweaters (shirts that open to ventilate) and wool or polar-fleece pants, NOT cotton, typically polyester or wool (keep extra or peel off to day pack).
- A windproof layer breaks the wind, like nylon windbreaker or parka shell with hood (CAREFUL around campfires wearing nylon or other synthetics) and pants of nylon or nylon/cotton/polyester blend over wool or polar-fleece pants. Military surplus usually has good clothing for this function.

Footwear

- Wicking liner sock (to wick away sweat).
- Wool socks, sometimes 2 pairs.
- Boots of leather or suede for milder weather possibly with Thinsulate and GoreTex linings, rubber boots for cold-wet conditions, mukluks for extreme cold.
Always carry extra socks

Head

- Thin silk/polyester balaclava for head, neck and face.
- Watch cap of wool or polar fleece over the balaclava.
- Hood on wind shell.
If your feet are cold, put a hat on.

Hands

- Thin gloves of silk or fleece.

- Mittens of wool fleece.
- Over-mitts of leather, wool, Gore-Tex.

Do NOT use synthetic material gloves around the campfire/cook stove.

Rain Gear

- Rain jacket and rain pants.

Expect rain unless the temperature is to be below 20 F.

Sleeping Gear

- Three-season bag lined with a summer bag, a liner of fleece or wool will work except for sub-zero camping. A mummy style bag will retain more heat, or fashion some hood to the bag.
- Bivy sack of rip-stop nylon to cover bag will add another 5 F to sleeping bag.
- Closed-cell foam pad under the bag to give insulation from the ground - air mattresses are not recommended, and cots have no insulation underneath them.
- Space blanket under the foam pad.

Tent

- A tent is not intended to keep you warm, but to break the wind and shed snow and rain.
- A-frame tents satisfactory for milder winter conditions.
- Two-pole dome tents are not good in extreme weather conditions.
- Two-pole tents are not rigid to carry snow loads, resist winds.
- Use geo-domes with crisscross poles for expeditions in worst conditions.

Tents need to be anchored to the ground more securely in winter camping than at other times of year.

- Vestibule for gear is a good idea.
- Self-standing tents are good for frozen ground.
- ***Pitch a tent above the surrounding area, so if the snow melts or it rains then the tent is not in the middle of a pool.***
- Erect tents at right-angles in the wind's direction.
- Place a round cloth under a tent so the tent does not freeze to ground.

Water

Dehydration greatly increases the chance of hypothermia.

- Each person needs 1 gallon of water per day.

Keeping water from freezing becomes a part of winter camping, especially when temperature under 20 F.

- Personal water bottle under out-layer of clothing.
- Turn jugs upside down at night.
- Insulate water jugs if temperature below 0 F.
- Have a source of water beforehand since treating water with a filtration unit or with iodine tablets becomes problematic under 20 F. Boiling uses too much fuel.

***Do NOT eat snow - it chills the body.
Bird droppings and snow are both white.***

Fire

- Do not rely upon a fire to provide warmth on a campout. Conditions may make making a fire impossible and are difficult and time consuming to maintain. ➤
- Bring fire starters with you. A match and tinder in wet, cold weather is not sufficient.
 - Cotton (not synthetic materials) dryer lint of a tennis ball size with a marble size addition of petroleum jelly will act as a starter. Place under a tinder litter, under a pyramid of kindling.
 - Boy Scout Hot Spark will light the lint/jelly mixture (need a carbon steel knife with the Hot Spark).
 - Butane and propane lighters are not reliable or useless in cold weather.
 - A pine board and knife in your pack can make a fuzz stick.
 - Bring dry firewood with you, if possible, at least to get a bed of hot coals.
- Stoves are less efficient during winter weather. Butane may not work, and the efficiency of propane diminishes greatly.
- DO NOT Gasoline and kerosene will cause instant frostbite if spilled on bare skin. They are not permissible per Guide to Safe Scouting

Food

Winter camping expends more calories than other activities, so menus need to provide more calories than normal.

- Teens may need as many as 5000 calories for winter camping if very active.
- Need food to keep the body's furnace fueled, > fats and proteins.
 - Dinners of chili, stews.
 - Lunches with hot soup and fatty meat and cheeses;
 - Breakfasts of eggs and/or meat, and cereal.
- Meals need to have a warm course.
- Meals should be simple to prepare, since it will be difficult to work with gloves on.

Winter Activity Safety Resources

Guide to Safe Scouting – Winter Activities

Go to <https://www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/gss/gss12/>

Winter Camping Safety see <https://www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/gss/gss12/>

1. **Qualified Supervision.** It is vital that a leader be an experienced winter camper with strong character and common sense.
2. **Equipment.** Be completely outfitted for cold weather. Equipment should be checked to ensure good condition for the activity and proper maintenance while in use. Youth should be adequately clothed, and blankets should be a suitable quality and weight.
3. **Physical Fitness.** Youth should be suitably fit for the activity. Periodic rests while building snow caves and engaging in other strenuous cold-weather activities will help prevent accidents and overheating.
4. **Buddy System.** Having Youth paired aids in monitoring each other's physical condition and observation of surroundings and circumstances.
5. **Planning.** Safe activities follow a plan that has been conscientiously developed. In winter, plan to cover no more than 5 miles per day on snowshoes or 10 to 12 miles on cross-country skis. Allow ample time to make it to camp at the end of the day.
6. **Safe Area.** Leaders should determine whether an area for winter camping is well-suited and free of hazards.
7. **Weather Check.** Weather conditions, potential hazards, and the appropriate responses should be understood and anticipated. Go to my.scouting.org for Hazardous Weather training.
8. **Burning.** Never use flames in tents, teepees, or snow shelters. This includes burning any solid, liquid, gel, or gas fuel; using features of tents or teepees that support stoves or fires; and use of chemical-fueled equipment and catalytic heaters.
9. **Discipline.** Rules are effective only when followed. All participants should know, understand, and respect the rules and procedures for a safe winter camping experience. Applicable rules should be discussed prior to the outing and reviewed for all participants when leaving for the winter campout.

Winter Sports Safety

Beyond camping, a number of cold-weather activities present challenges to the youth and leader, such as cross-country skiing, ice skating, sledding, ice fishing, and snowshoeing. Essential ingredients for fun include skill training and an awareness of the hazards unique to these activities. Snow conditions, hazardous terrain, special clothing needs, and emergency survival are important issues for a safe and successful experience.

Be sure your winter outdoor activities always follow these guidelines:

1. All winter activities must be supervised by mature and conscientious adults (at least one of whom must be age 21 or older) who understand and knowingly accept responsibility for the well-being and safety of the youth in their care, who are experienced and qualified in the

particular skills and equipment involved in the activity, and who are committed to compliance with the seven points of BSA Winter Sports Safety. Direct supervision should be maintained at all times by two or more adults when youth are in the field. The appropriate number of supervisors will increase depending on the number of participants, the type of activity, and environmental conditions.

2. Winter sports activities embody intrinsic hazards that vary from sport to sport. Participants should be aware of the potential hazards of any winter sport before engaging in it. Leaders should emphasize preventing accidents through adherence to safety measures and proper technique.
3. Appropriate personal protective equipment is required for all activities. This includes the recommended use of helmets for all participants engaged in winter sports, such as sledding and riding other sliding devices. The use of helmets is required for the following activities: downhill skiing, snowboarding.
4. Winter sports activities often place greater demands on a participant's cardiopulmonary system, and people with underlying medical conditions (especially if the heart or lungs are involved) should not participate without medical consultation and direction. For participants without underlying medical conditions, the annual health history and physical examination by a licensed health-care practitioner every year is sufficient. The adult leader should be familiar with the physical circumstances of each youth participant and make appropriate adjustments to the activity or provide protection as warranted by individual health or physical conditions. Adults participating in strenuous outdoor winter activity should have an annual physical examination. It is recommended that the medical assessment be performed by a licensed health-care practitioner knowledgeable of the sport and the particular physical demands the activity will place on the individual.
5. For winter sports such as skiing, snowboarding, etc., that utilize specialized equipment, it is essential that all equipment fit and function properly.
6. When youth are engaging in downhill activities such as sledding or tobogganing, minimize the likelihood of collision with immobile obstacles. Use only designated areas where rocks, tree stumps, and other potential obstacles have been identified and marked, cleared away, shielded, or buffered in some way.
7. All participants should know, understand, and respect the rules and procedures for safe winter activity. The applicable rules should be presented and learned before the outing, and all participants should review them just before the activity begins. When youth know and understand the reasons for the rules, they will observe them. When fairly and impartially applied, rules do not interfere with fun. Rules for safety, plus common sense and good judgment, keep the fun from being interrupted by tragedy.

SOURCE: The above information was taken directly from the BSA Website page titled *Winter Activities* <https://www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/gss/gss12/> on December 27, 2023.

BSA Safety Moments: Winter Related Webpages

Frostbite: <https://www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/safety-moments/frostbite/>

Hypothermia: <https://www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/safety-moments/hypothermia/>

Weather Related Safety: <https://www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/safety-moments/weather-related-safety/>

Winter Activity: <https://www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/safety-moments/winter-activity/>

Winter Sports Safety: <https://www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/safety-moments/winter-sports/>

Campfire Safety: <https://www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/safety-moments/camp-fire-safety/>

Propane Stoves: <https://www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/safety-moments/propane-stoves/>

Other BSA Resources on Winter Camping/Activities

Fieldbook, Boy Scouts of America*, see chapter on Winter Camping

Camping Merit Badge pamphlet, Boy Scouts of America*

**Available from the Scout Shop, both in-store and online store.*

Scouting magazine's blog **AARON ON SCOUTING**:

[Five things to think about when asking Scouts to camp in the cold](#), December 5, 2023

[Eight ideas for staying warm while cold-weather camping](#), January 27, 2023

[Being prepared for Cold-Weather Camping](#), November 10, 2022