Hypothermia means “low temperature”. When your body is exposed to cold temperature, it tries to protect itself by keeping a normal body temperature of 98.6°F. It tries to reduce heat loss by shivering and moving blood from your arms and legs to the core of your body—head, chest and abdomen.

**Stages of Hypothermia**

**Mild Hypothermia**  
(Core body temperature of 98.6°—93.2°F)  
Symptoms: Shivering; altered judgment; numbness; clumsiness; loss of dexterity; pain from cold; and fast breathing.

**Moderate Hypothermia**  
(Core body temperature of 93.2°—86°F)  
Symptoms: Semiconscious to unconscious; shivering reduced or absent; lips are blue; slurred speech; rigid muscles; appears drunk; slow breathing; and feeling of warmth can occur.

**Severe Hypothermia**  
(Core body temperature below 86°F)  
Symptoms: Coma; heart stops; and clinical death.

Visit these websites for more water safety and hypothermia prevention information.

- **East Pierce Fire & Rescue**  
  www.eastpiercefire.org
- **Washington State Drowning Prevention Coalition**  
  www.drowning-prevention.org
- **Children’s Hospital & Regional Medical Center**  
  www.seattlechildrens.org
- **Hypothermia Prevention, Recognition and Treatment**  
  www.hypothermia.org
- **Boat Washington**  
  www.boatwashington.org
- **Boat U.S. Foundation**  
  www.boatus.com
- **Boat Safe**  
  www.boatsafe.com

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**In Our Lakes and Rivers**

**Even in Summer!**

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**Headquarters Station**  
18421 Old Buckley Hwy  
Bonney Lake, WA 98391  
Phone: 253-863-1800  
Fax: 253-863-1848  
Email: epfr@eastpiercefire.org
By choosing to swim in colder water you reduce your survival time. Distance can be deceiving in the water—shore may be farther than it appears.

**Common Misconceptions**

Vigorous swimming will help keep my body warm when swimming in cold water.

**FACT:** Swimming in cold water will not keep you warm. Even though you feel warmer because blood rushes to the skin, you actually lose more heat by swimming.

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You can’t get hypothermia while swimming when it is hot outside.

**FACT:** Even when it’s hot outside, the water may be cold enough to cause hypothermia.

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I don’t have to worry about hypothermia because I’m athletic and fit—I’m a starter on the varsity basketball team!

**FACT:** People with low body fat (especially males) have a higher risk of hypothermia. Lean bodies cool faster in the water. Even the strongest swimmers will get hypothermia.

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Alcohol and drugs don’t have an affect on hypothermia.

**FACT:** Alcohol and drugs can give you a false sense of warmth because it opens blood vessels next to the skin. This can cause the body to lose heat faster.

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I can swim just as far in a lake or river as I can in a pool.

**FACT:** People underestimate the coldness of water and its affect on their swimming ability.

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**50/50/50 Rule**

An “average” adult has a 50% chance of surviving a 50 yard swim in 50°F water.

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**Who’s At Risk for Hypothermia While Swimming?**

EVERYONE! But especially...

- Elderly
- Children
- People with lower body fat
- Males (generally cool faster than females)

Your body loses heat 30 times faster in water. Surprisingly, water under 80°F poses a risk of hypothermia. The colder the water, the quicker hypothermia will occur.

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**Waters in Western Washington**

Most of the lakes and rivers in Western Washington are glacial fed making for a very chilly average water temperature of 53°F year round—brrrrr! Despite the cold water, Washington waters are a magnet for open water recreation—including swimming.

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**Protect Yourself**

- Wear a life vest!
- Look for subtle signs:
  - shivering
  - altered judgment
  - blueness of fingers, toes or lips
- **If you have any of these signs, stay out of the water until warmed.**
- Equip yourself with lifesaving skills:
  - learn how to swim
  - learn C.P.R.
  - know what to do when in trouble

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**Always wear a life vest when in or around the water.**