

Winter Activities

Winter Camping Safety

There is magic to camping in winter. It is one of the most challenging of outdoor adventures. The Boy Scouts of America operates the National Cold-Weather Camping Development Center at Northern Tier through the Okpik program. Visit www.ntier.org for comprehensive winter camping preparation information. Special considerations for winter camping are:

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. Scouts should be adequately clothed, and blankets should be a suitable quality and weight.
TIP: Use alkaline batteries in flashlights, as standard batteries deteriorate quickly in cold weather.
TIP: Encourage youths to wear brightly colored clothing so they are more visible during severe weather.
3. **Physical Fitness.** Scouts 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.
TIP: Pulling a load over snow on a sled or toboggan is generally easier than carrying a backpack.
4. **Buddy System.** Having Scouts 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.
TIP: Always bring a bit more food, water, and clothing than what you think you'll need.
6. **Safe Area.** Leaders should determine whether an area for winter camping is well-suited and free of hazards.
TIP: Always test the thickness of ice before venturing any distance from shore. The ice should be at least 3 inches thick for a small group.
TIP: Look for dead branches hanging in the trees overhead.
TIP: Avoid ridge tops and open areas where wind can blow down tents or create drifts.

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 Scout and leader, such as cross-country skiing, ice skating, sledding, snowmobiling, 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 Scouts 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 and 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 Scouts 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.