

Safety Tip of the Month – December 2005
VSI Safety Committee
How cold is it?

Brrrr..... summer is over, right? Hypothermia, or lowering of the core body temperature, is a serious condition that may occur in any season of the year. The body normally regulates its temperature through the hypothalamus center in the brain. Prolonged exposure to cold water and / or air wears down the body's compensatory mechanisms. Shivering may occur in an effort to generate more body heat. The arms and legs become very cool as the skin and muscle blood vessels constrict to conserve heat. Continued cold exposure leads to lethargy, apathy, hallucinations, increased urine output, lower heart rate, and decreasing blood pressure. The resulting confusion and weakness associated with hypothermia may increase the risk for falls on the deck and misjudgment of turns and lane line boundaries in the pool. Progressive hypothermia may cause heart irregularities and significant muscular weakness.

A few tips to help swimmers stay warm include:

1. Encourage swimmers to bring an extra large towel to every meet.
2. Remind swimmers to drink water frequently. A lower internal fluid volume, in the midst of hypothermia, may lead to very low blood pressure.
3. Ask each swimmer from your team to bring their training jackets and to dress in layers. Swimmers may take off a layer at a time, just when they begin to feel somewhat "toasty." Encourage swimmers to wear warm-up pants and a jacket when they are not in the water.
4. Provide frequent meals for the swimmers. Hypothermia increases caloric expenditures.
5. Insist that your swimmers wear socks and some sort of shoes when leaving the venue. Bare feet in sandals are very susceptible to frostbite, which can occur in 15 minutes or less under certain "wind chill" conditions.
6. Emphasize to your swimmers the importance of adequate sleep. Adequate rest improves the body's normal compensatory mechanisms to conserve heat.
7. Stay out of drafty areas in the pool venue, it may feel good but it will increase the rate of heat loss in swimmers.

So, be cool..... and stay WARM !!