

## Dressing Your Preschooler for Winter

Winter brings many outdoor activities for your preschooler. Outdoor experiences are important for young children (and fun!). Therefore, dressing appropriately and paying attention to the weather are crucial.

Barbara Garske, child care provider from Vilas County said, "A child will not admit to being cold just to be able to stay outside. It's a parent's responsibility to provide winter clothing that is warm and comfortable for their children."

### Dress in Layers

When you dress your child in layers, you allow buffer zones of warm air to get trapped between garments, providing superior insulation. The National Ski Patrol recommends a triple layer strategy to keep warm, dry and comfortable.

1. **Start with a moisture-wicking under layer.** Begin with long johns. For children, a two piece top-and-bottom set is easier to get on and off. Choose a quick-drying, moisture wicking fabric. Avoid cotton because it absorbs perspiration and sticks to the skin.
2. **Add an insulating middle layer.** The middle layer should be a lightweight stretchy insulator such as a breathable fleece sweater or vest. Fleece has tiny pockets of space that trap and retain warm air. It's machine washable, stretchy, and comes in light to heavy weights. Buy the

fleece as a two-piece and make sure both pieces are loose fitting.

3. **Top with a protective outer layer.** The outer layer, or shell, keeps warm air in and wind and water out. Fabrics for a two-piece parka and snow pants should be tightly woven to keep the inner layers of warm air trapped next to the body. Yet, the shell should create a moisture barrier while allowing moisture to escape from inside. Look for these terms on the label: wind resistant, water-repellent, and breathable.

### Cover All Body Parts

Protect feet, hands and heads. Keep hats on children because most body heat escapes from the head. Hands and feet are most susceptible to frostbite. In addition to snow pants, Pennsylvania State University's Better Kid Care Program gives a list of essential cold weather gear:



- **Hat**—Since about 50 percent of our body heat is lost from our heads, it's important to have a hat. Select a hat that is warm and lightweight. The hat should cover the ears.
- **Mittens**—Mittens work better than gloves; hands stay warmer because they allow

warm air to circulate around fingers. Elasticized cuffs keep out snow and wind. When playing in snow, change mittens when they become wet or wear water-resistant or waterproof mittens.

- **Boots and Socks**—Choose water-resistant or waterproof boots that are roomy enough for winter socks. Select socks that are a blend of polyester (to wick away perspiration) and wool (for warmth).
- **Scarf**—Use a scarf or knit mask to cover face and mouth. For active children, neck warmers may be safer than a scarf. Select “non-itch” type fabric.

### Other Cold Weather Safety Tips

- Dress your children in bright colors if they are playing or walking outdoors in snowy conditions.
- Avoid clothing with overly large pockets, draw-strings at the neck or waist, and ties on hoods and caps as they are apt to get caught as they play.
- Remember the sunscreen. Children can sunburn when winter sun reflects off winter snow.
- Set reasonable time limits on how long your children can play outdoors. Base these limits on weather conditions. A rule of thumb is to have your child come inside every half an hour to warm up when playing outside during cold weather.
- Try to keep clothes dry. Wet clothes will not keep your child warm. Clothes get wet from perspiration and from the weather. When children get overheated, take off a layer of clothes or remove a hat. When clothes get wet, replace with dry clothes.



- Pay attention to the National Weather Service's winter weather advisories regarding wind chill and rain. If it is damp or windy outside, hypothermia—which occurs when body temperature drops drastically below normal—can occur in temperatures as warm as 50 degrees.

With proper clothing and an awareness of winter safety, you and your preschooler will be ready to enjoy outdoor winter activities.



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Prepared by: Joan E. LeFebvre, Professor, Department of Family Development, University of Wisconsin-Extension  
Reviewers: Steven Small, Extension Specialist, Human Development & Family Relations, UW-Madison, and Dave Riley, Extension Specialist, Child Development & Early Education, UW-Madison  
Layout: Penny Otte, Office Operations Associate, Family Living Area Office, Vilas County

For more information on Parenting and Child Development, contact: Joan E. LeFebvre, Area Family Living Agent, University of Wisconsin, Extension, 330 Court Street, Courthouse, Eagle River WI 54521-8362, 715-479-3653, FAX 715-479-3605, E-Mail [joan.lefebvre@ces.uwex.edu](mailto:joan.lefebvre@ces.uwex.edu) November, 2007