



Avalanche

People caught in avalanches can die from suffocation, trauma, or hypothermia. On average, 28 people die in avalanches every winter in the United States. An avalanche is a large amount of snow moving quickly down a mountain, typically on slopes of 30–45 degrees. When an avalanche stops, the snow becomes solid, like concrete, and people are unable to dig out. Avalanches can:

- Be caused by people, new snow, and wind;
- Move at speeds of 60-80 MPH; and
- Peak during the period of December through March.

How to protect yourself from an avalanche

- Get training on how to recognize hazardous conditions and avalanche-prone locations.
- Learn how to properly use safety equipment.
- Sign up for alerts on current avalanche dangers.
- Get proper equipment to protect yourself from head injuries and create air pockets.
- Use devices to support rescue.
- Always have a buddy, preferably one familiar with the area.

What to do NOW: Prepare

- Learn about your local avalanche risk.
- Sign up for alerts from a U.S. Forest Service Avalanche Center near you. Your community may also have a local warning system on which you can rely.
- Learn the signs of an avalanche and how to use safety and rescue equipment.
- Receive first aid training so you can recognize and treat suffocation, hypothermia, traumatic injury, and shock, and learn how to use safety and rescue equipment
- Travel with a guide who knows which locations to avoid. Always travel in pairs.
- Follow avalanche warnings on roads. Roads may be closed, or vehicles may be advised not to stop on the roadside.
- Avoid areas of increased risk, such as slopes steeper than 30 degrees or areas under steep slopes.
- Know the signs of increased danger, including recent avalanches and shooting cracks across slopes.
- Wear a helmet to help reduce head injuries and create air pockets.
- Wear an avalanche beacon to help rescuers locate you.
- Use an avalanche airbag that may help you from being completely buried.
- Carry a collapsible avalanche probe and a small shovel to help rescue others.

What to do DURING: Survive

- The most important actions you can take to survive an avalanche are taken before it happens:
- Know the conditions;
 - Avoid locations where there is danger of an avalanche.
 - Always travel in pairs; and
 - Use and carry safety equipment and rescue gear;
 - Get the training;

- Check for and listen to alerts;
- If your partner or others are buried, call 911 and then begin to search if it is safe to do so.
- If you have the proper training, treat others for suffocation, hypothermia, traumatic injury, or shock.

What to do AFTER: Be Safe

- Know the signs and ways to treat hypothermia.
- Hypothermia is an unusually low body temperature. A body temperature below 95 degrees is an emergency.
 - Signs: shivering, exhaustion, confusion, fumbling hands, memory loss, slurred speech, and drowsiness
 - Actions: Go to a warm room or shelter. Warm the center of the body first—chest, neck, head, and groin. Keep the person dry and wrapped up in warm blankets, including the head and neck.

Related Information

- [Avalanche Information Sheet](#) (link)
- [The National Avalanche Center](#) (link)