

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

INTERNATIONAL
STUDENT AND
SCHOLAR SERVICES

Office of International Programs



FAMILY RESOURCE GUIDE

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LIVING IN THE U.S.

HOLIDAYS AND CUSTOMS

One fun way to learn about a culture is to participate in its traditions. Also, in the days leading up to a holiday, schools will often have activities for their students to learn about the holidays. Ask your children what they are learning about the holidays and customs in the United States. Below are a few holidays that people in the United States often celebrate:

Holidays

The following days are considered holidays, and the majority of businesses and schools are closed on these days.

January 1: New Year's Day: Welcome the new year with parties starting the night before (New Year's Eve on December 31st).

3rd Monday in January: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. Commemorate the birthday of the African-American civil rights leader, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964.

3rd Monday of February: President's Day. Honor past presidents like George Washington (the nation's first leader), and Abraham Lincoln (Civil War president who helped abolish slavery).

Last Monday of May: Memorial Day. Remember the men and women who died while serving in the U.S. Armed Forces.

July 4: Independence Day. View public displays of fireworks as Americans mark the date in 1776 when thirteen U.S. states declared their independence from England.

1st Monday in September: Labor Day. Honor the contributions and efforts of hard workers throughout the country.

2nd Monday in October: Columbus Day. Pay tribute to Christopher Columbus, who is traditionally thought of as the discoverer of the Americas in 1492.

Last Thursday in November: Thanksgiving Day. Feast on a traditional meal that commemorates the dinner of Pilgrims (first settlers of the thirteen colonies) and the Native Americans.

December 25: Christmas Day. Celebrate the birth of Christ, leader of the Christian faith, by exchanging gifts with family and friends.

Customs

The following days are usually celebrated in the United States, even though businesses and schools are not typically closed during these days.

February 14: Valentine’s Day. This has become a day to celebrate love and romance. “Valentines” or tokens of love (cards, candy, gifts) are exchanged.

March 17: St. Patrick’s Day. Parades and parties mark this day honoring the patron saint of Ireland.

April 1: April Fools’ Day. Harmless jokes or tricks are traditionally played on the unsuspecting.

May (the 2nd Sunday): Mother’s Day. As the title suggests, many people choose to honor their mothers on this day with cards, gifts, etc.

June (the 3rd Sunday): Father’s Day. On this day, many people choose to honor their fathers with cards, gifts, etc.

October 31: Halloween. On the eve of All Saint’s Day, many people dress in costume (often scary ones!) for parties; and children go door to door in their neighborhoods to receive candy. Children say “trick or treat” when you answer the door. You then usually give candy or treats to the children and say “Happy Halloween!”

WEATHER

For general information about weather in Minnesota, winter weather and winter clothing, please visit the ISSS Student Handbook: www.iss.umn.edu/new/HandBook/8.pdf

Where to find winter clothing

Winter clothing may be found at many stores, beginning in the fall. Inexpensive new clothing is available at Thrifty Outfitters, TJ Maxx, Burlington Coat Factory, Target, WalMart, and factory outlets. More expensive but high quality clothing is available at Cabela’s, Midwest Mountaineering, REI, Eddie Bauer, Marshall Field’s, Saks Fifth Avenue, Neiman Marcus, and many other stores. Locations and store hours can be found online or in the yellow pages of the local phone book (DEX).

Dressing children for the winter

Dressing children in cold weather presents some unique challenges for parents. How do you keep your child warm and dry, without over-bundling or restricting movement?

The solution is to dress your child like an onion – in other words, in layers. When you dress your child in layers, you allow buffer zones of warm air

to get trapped between garments, providing superior insulation. A recent study by Colorado State University confirmed it: layering several light garments was proven to offer better protection than a single layer of heavy outerwear.

What is the best way to layer? Based on the recommendations of several cold-weather experts, including the National Ski Patrol, we recommend the following triple-layer strategy:

1. Start with a moisture-wicking under layer
2. Add an insulating middle layer
3. Top with a protective outer layer

Whether your destination is the local elementary school or the neighborhood sled hill, you can use this strategy to keep your child (and yourself) warm, dry and comfortable all winter. Here's how:

1. Start with a Moisture-Wicking Under Layer

Begin by dressing your child in long johns. Choose a quick-drying, moisture-wicking fabric, such as a polyester/ rayon blend. Surprisingly, you should avoid cotton because it absorbs perspiration and sticks to the skin. When it comes to cold weather, half the battle is what the experts call “moisture management.”

Why is it so important to stay dry? Because water conducts heat roughly 15 times faster than air. That means moisture rushes heat away from the body, lowering the body's core temperature. Ultimately, it can lead to hypothermia, a potentially life-threatening condition. For children, a two-piece top-and-bottom set makes a better choice than a one-piece union suit, because it's easier to get on and off (especially for quick bathroom breaks).

2. Cover with an Insulating Middle Layer

Since the point of layering is to create insulating zones of warm air, it is important to choose the right mid-layer garments. And the experts agree: for efficient insulation, nothing beats polyester fleece. One advantage of fleece is that it offers “loft” – tiny pockets of space that trap and retain warm air. In addition, fleece is breathable, comfortable and “non-itchy.” It is also machine washable, stretchy, and available in a range of weights to suit various climates and activity levels.

We recommend two-piece fleece separates for kids. Make sure they are loose fitting (so they won't restrict movement) and light enough for layering. Avoid denim jeans, which can become quickly bogged down with water and snow.

3. Top with a Protective Outer Layer

The purpose of this outer layer (or shell) is to keep warm air in and wind and water out. Whether you choose a two-piece parka/snow-pants combination or a one-piece snowsuit, we recommend that you look for high-performance fabrics such as those designed for skiers. These fabrics are tightly woven to keep the inner layers of warm air from blowing away from the body. Then they're coated or laminated on the outside to create a barrier against moisture. At the same time, they're breathable, allowing moisture from inside to escape. In other words, when shopping for outerwear, you want to see these three terms: wind resistant, water-repellant, and breathable.

In addition, consider the following:

- Look for ribbing or elastic at the wrist and ankles. These help lock out snow and wind.
- Choose a high neckline that offers added protection.
- For safety's sake, avoid garments that feature ties and cords.
- Full-length zippers (including leg zippers on pants) are the easiest to get on and off. Most kids have a hard time with over-the-head jackets.
- Make sure your child's outerwear is roomy enough to accommodate under layers.
- If choosing a two-piece jacket and snow pants combo, look for a longer jacket that hits mid-thigh. When kids are engaged in physical activities like sledding, you want to make sure their backs are covered.

Choosing Accessories

When it comes to protecting little heads, hands and feet, choosing the right accessories can make all the difference.

Hats

According to the experts, you can lose up to 50% or more of your body heat through the top of your head. That's why it's so important to have one or more great hats. We favor synthetic fabrics (like fleece), which are warm, lightweight and breathable. No matter which style hat you choose, make sure it completely covers both of your child's ears.

How do you get a child to keep his or her hat on? First, include your child in the decision-making process. If your child loves her headgear, she is more likely to wear it. Second, make sure it's made of a comfortable fabric that doesn't itch.

Neck Warmers

Scarves come and go in popularity, but they are never a safe choice for kids in action. Instead, elect stretchy neck gaiters that your child can lift or lower as needed. Choose a fabric that won't irritate tender skin.

Mittens and Gloves

According to the experts, mittens provide better warmth than gloves, because they allow more warm air to circulate around the fingers. When choosing mittens, look for elasticized wrists that keep out snow and wind and longer cuffs for added warmth. We like fleece mittens that offer a non-skid surface on the palms and thumbs – they allow kids to turn door-knobs and keep a safe grip on sleds and such. Another mitten tip: keep extras handy...so when one pair gets wet, you can quickly offer a fresh, dry pair.

Socks and Shoes

How do you keep those tootsies toasty? Start with a good pair of winter sports socks. Experts recommend a blend of polyester (for wicking) and wool (for warmth). Remember, cotton tends to collect water and should be avoided for outdoor gear.

Choose waterproof boots with an insulating layer; rubber and leather are both good choices. Make sure boots are roomy enough for winter socks. We prefer Velcro® closures to laces: kids can manage them better independently, and they are easier to get on and off in a hurry.

Tip: Look for boots that feature removable liners--and buy an extra pair. That way, you'll always have a dry pair ready and waiting!

Other Cold Weather Safety Tips

- Just because it's winter, that doesn't mean your child can't get sun-burned, particularly when sunlight is reflecting off snow. Don't forget the sun block and lip balm! Also, consider sunglasses or goggles with UV protection.
- On a blustery day, you may want to apply petroleum jelly to your child's cheeks, nose, forehead, and chin to provide a layer of protection against windburn.
- Make it a point to keep your child well hydrated. Active kids can become dehydrated in any weather. Offer a glass of water with each bathroom break.
- Examine your child periodically to make sure he is not cold or wet. It's not enough to ask – he may be having too much fun to realize he's chilled. Check for whiting of the skin (a sign of frostbite), as well as shivering and loss of coordination (indications of hypothermia).
- Follow our head-to-toe cold-weather strategy...and create some warm and wonderful winter memories!

This information was taken from www.leapsandbounds.com

Temperature

In the US temperature is measured according to the Fahrenheit scale. To convert Celsius (Centigrade) to Fahrenheit, multiply by 1.8 (or 9/5) and add 32. Conversely, to convert Fahrenheit to Celsius, subtract 32 and divided by 1.8.

Normal Body Temperature: 98.6° F or 37° C

Celsius	Fahrenheit
-17.8°	0°
-10°	14°
0°	32°
10°	50°
20°	68°
30°	86°
40°	104°
100°	212°

WEIGHTS AND MEASUREMENTS

In the US weight is expressed in terms of “ounces” (oz.) and “pounds” (lbs.).

Weights	
US System	Metric System
1 oz.	30 g.
16 oz. or 1 lb	450 g.
2.2 lbs	1000 g. or 1 kilogram (kg.)
2000 lbs or 1 ton	900 kg

US Length /Distance Measure

Term	Abbreviation	Symbol	Equivalents
inch	in.	”	1”
foot	ft.	’	12” or 1’
yard	yd.	(none)	36” or 3’ or 1 yd.
miles	mi.	(none)	5280’ or 1mi.

Cooking Measures

Measurements for recipes in the US are in terms of volume rather than weight for dry as well as liquid ingredients. The standards of measure such as “teaspoon” or “cup” refer to cooking utensils you can buy at any supermarket. The terms do not refer to the common household teaspoon or cup.

Abbreviations Used in Cookbooks

Abbreviation	Unit of Measurement
tsp. (or t)	teaspoon
tbs. (or T)	tablespoon
C (or c.)	cup
oz.	ounce
pt.	pint
qt.	quart
lb.	pound

Liquid Measurement

Spoons and Cups	Liquid Ounces
1 tsp.	1/6 oz.
1 tbs.	1/2 oz.
6 2/3 tbs	3 1/2 oz.
1 C. (16 tbs.)	8 oz.
2 C. (1pt.)	16 oz. (1 lb.)
4 C. (1qt.)	32 oz. (2 lbs.)
4 1/3 C.	2.2 lbs.

Volume Conversion for Ingredients

	US System	Metric System
Liquids:	1 liquid qt.	0.95 liter
	1.06 liquid qts.	1 liter
Dry:	.091 dry qts.	1 liter
	1 dry qt.	1.1 liter

Oven Temperature

	Fahrenheit	Celsius
Cool	200	93
Low or very low	225	107
Slow	300	149
Moderate	350 - 375	177 - 191
Hot	400 or above	205 or above

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