

Winter storm hazard: Snowblower injuries

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Photo: U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission

Broken bones, amputation possible if safety precautions not followed, expert warns.

(HealthDay)—The massive winter storm battering the northeastern United States means that many people will be using snowblowers to clear snow from their driveways and sidewalks.

While snowblowers can make that task easier, they can also cause serious injuries if people fail to take proper safety precautions, an expert warns.

Each year, about 5,700 people in the United States go to the emergency room for treatment of snowblower-related injuries such as [broken bones](#), cuts to skin and soft tissue, bruises, and sprains. About 10 percent of injuries involve amputation of the hand or fingers.

"Snowblower injuries tend to happen when someone stops paying attention for even a few seconds," Dr. R. Michael Koch, chief of the microsurgery and replantation service at the Westchester Medical Center in Valhalla, N.Y., said in a center news release.

"Even after the snowblower is turned off, tension is stored in the [rotor blades](#). A hand or finger stuck in to remove wet snow or ice is at risk for being cut, mangled or even amputated," added Koch, who is also an assistant professor of surgery at New York Medical College and a surgeon with the New York Group for Plastic Surgery.

To stay safe, keep your hands and fingers out of the snowblower mechanism whether the machine is running or turned off. Do not disable the [safety devices](#) built into most new snowblowers and take the time to review the key [safety features](#) in the owner's manual.

In addition, always pay attention when using a snowblower. Many accidents occur when people allow their thoughts to wander, they get distracted, or they're in a hurry and skip important safety steps, Koch said.

It is also recommended that you wear thick gloves when using a snowblower. They don't offer complete protection, but may lessen the potential damage if there is an accident.

Koch noted that advances in [microsurgery](#) enable surgeons to reattach, replace or repair hands and fingers that are injured in snowblower accidents.

More information: The American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons offers tips to prevent [snow-shoveling and snowblower injuries](#).

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