

Misjudging thin ice can be fatal, check first

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Before you venture onto frozen ponds, lakes and rivers, it's critical to make sure they're safe, an expert cautions.

"A minimum of four inches of clear, newly formed ice is needed to support one person on foot," according to Curt Sinclair, a natural resources specialist at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

"New ice is usually stronger than old ice, and clear ice is usually stronger than ice that appears cloudy," Sinclair explained in a university news release.

Ice is seldom uniform, because [water movement](#) and [snow cover](#) can create significant differences in [ice thickness](#) and strength. Moving water under frozen streams interferes with the freezing process, Sinclair noted.

"A pond may have 12 inches of ice in one area and only 1 inch of ice only 10 feet away," he said.

If you plan to get out on the ice, here are safety tips from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources:

- Test the thickness of the ice in several areas.
- Wear a personal flotation device under winter gear.
- Don't fish or play on the ice alone and keep a [safe distance](#) from others on the ice.
- Carry a rope to pull someone out of the water if needed.
- Carry a pair of ice picks to pull yourself out of slippery, water-covered ice.

More information: Michigan State University has more on [ice safety](#).

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