

Dressing Infants for Cold Weather

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With the increase in citizen-oriented reenactments, the event “season” may no longer contain itself to just the warm weather months. For those of us with infants and small babies, keeping them warm and accurate becomes a top priority. Fortunately, the solutions are there. Not every event will be “infant friendly”—but with some preparation, you can widen the range of events you attend with your infant, without a compromise in safety or accuracy.

The Best Fabrics

Wool remains the ideal cold weather fabric. Available in a variety of weaves, weights, and qualities, it retains its insulating properties even when damp, wears well, and blocks the wind.

Even light layers of wool contribute to the overall comfort. Look to quilt shops for thin wool batting to use in quilted garments and wraps (it can be “peeled” in half for baby-scale-friendly weights), and lighter wools that drape easily.

Purchase the highest quality wool you can afford, even if it means saving up for a bit. Cheap grades tend to be scratchy, and an itchy baby is an unpleasant baby. However, the better grades (often imported from Australia and New Zealand) are very soft; some are treated with modern chemicals to render them machine washable, as well (this is non-period, but I have not found it to compromise the function or fire-retardant nature of the wool.) Wools such as cashmere are truly buttery.

As baby items use only small yardages, and it is rare for Baby to wear out an item before it is outgrown, investing in wools for your infant is a good option. Outgrown items you don’t plan to use for additional children will prove valuable to other families.

Other cold weather fabrics include **cotton** flannel for interlining garments (though this has none of the insulation properties of wool, and can be dangerous when damp, so it is not my first choice for dressing babies), and even **silks**, for lining quilted garments. Silk is lightweight, and helps the clothing slide on and off easily. Neither adds greatly to warmth, however.

As with all other period clothing, avoid synthetics. Even the modern “miracle” fabrics do not match good wool for its wicking, wind-blocking, and insulating characteristics. Modern fabrics like “polar fleece” are made of synthetic fibers that melt when exposed to flame. Wool will smolder and stink, but tends to self-extinguish rather than melting into Baby’s skin.

Use historically accurate textiles to reproduce historic styles for use in historic settings. It’s period correct, and safer.

Use Layers

As with adult cold weather dressing, **layers** are key to keeping Baby comfortable. Start at the top and bottom: A quilted wool cloth or knitted wool hood with a deep curtain is very useful for outdoor wear; for indoor use, make sure Baby has a light cotton cap to wear. Humans lose the greatest proportion of their body heat through their head and extremities, and babies are even more prone to such heat loss, as they lack hair to slow it.

Add warm woolen stockings to cover the feet and knees. (If Baby is truly sensitive to wool, use cotton stocking with wool worn over them). Add warm felted wool shoes or booties.

Continue on with warm (preferably soft wool) layers: a long petticoat, possibly quilted around the hem (with wool, cotton, or silk “wadding”); a knitted close jacket ‘round the torso; a warm woolen “shawl” blanket; a long coat, quilted in the sleeves and torso.

If you will be outdoors, add woolen mittens in a cheerful color. Wool holds reds very nicely, and the cheerful color goes well with rosy cheeks.

It is far better to bundle Baby in several light layers of warm fabric, which can be removed or added as weather and temperature conditions change, rather than one thick layer that offers “all or nothing” protection. Layers should be slightly loose-fitting, to allow for trapped warm air.

Take Care!

Infants are especially vulnerable to cold injuries. Do not spend extended time in the open during cold weather, and retire to a heated area frequently to change diapers, check fingers and toes for heat and good circulation, and just take a bit of respite from the chill.

Offer Baby warmed foods and drinks; breast milk is always the right temperature, of course. Formulas should be mixed in warmed water, and other warm beverages should be offered. Give tepid, rather than cool, plain water. Babies can become dehydrated very quickly in cold weather; keep an eye on the number of wet diapers you are changing.

Keep on hand a good supply of soft cotton flannel cloths for wiping noses and chins. Dampness on Baby’s face will quickly turn to chapping and rawness. Ointments and unguents may be necessary to prevent skin damage.

In everything, use common sense. If you are not comfortable, Baby is likely uncomfortable, too. Seek shelter, or consider choosing another event, for Baby’s sake.



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