Frost bite is literally frozen body tissue and should be handled carefully to prevent permanent tissue damage or loss. Frost bite is most likely to occur on the feet, hands, ears nose and face.

The best treatment is PREVENTION. Dress for the weather, dress in layers, wear gloves and a hat and get inside at the first sign of frostbite. Alcohol can alter the sense of a dangerous situation – please use caution when out in extremely cold weather.

Frostbite is rated by degree of severity and severity depends on how long the person is exposed to cold, the temperature, the wind-chill, and the humidity.

First degree
This is called frostnip and only affects the surface of the skin, which is frozen. On the onset, there is itching and pain, and then the skin develops white, red and yellow patches and becomes numb. The area affected by frostnip usually does not become permanently damaged as only the skin’s top layers are affected. Long-term insensitivity to both heat and cold can sometimes happen after suffering from frostnip.

Second degree
If freezing continues, the skin may freeze and harden, but the deep tissues are not affected and remain soft and normal. Second-degree injury usually blisters 1-2 days after becoming frozen with clear fluid filling the blisters. The blisters may become hard and blackened, but usually appear worse that they are. Most of the injuries heal in one month, but the area may become permanently insensitive to both heat and cold.

Treatment for 1st and 2nd degree frost bite.
Get out of the cold and into a warm room. Remove any wet clothes.
Don’t walk on frostbitten feet or toes if possible. This further damages the tissue.
Do not rub area that is frostbitten or rub snow on it.
Gradually warm frostbitten areas. Put hands or feet in warm – not hot- water (104-107 F). Wrap or cover other areas in a warm blanket. DON’T use direct heat, such as stove, heat lamp, fireplace or heating pad because these can cause burns before you feel them on your numb skin.
If there is any chance the affected areas will freeze again, don’t thaw them. Refreezing can cause even more damage. If you must go out again and area is thawed wrap it up so that it doesn’t freeze again.

Third and Fourth degree
If the area freezes further, deep frostbite occurs. The muscles, tendons, blood vessels, and nerves all freeze. The skin is hard, feels waxy, and use of the area is lost temporarily, and in severe cases, permanently. The deep frostbite results in areas of purplish blisters which turn black and which are generally blood-filled. Nerve damage in the area can results in a loss of feeling. This extreme frostbite may result in fingers and toes being amputated if the area becomes infected with gangrene. The extent of the damage can take months to assess.

Treatment for 3rd and 4th degree frostbite. Seek Immediate Medical attention.