

Keep Your Hands Safe!

Wishful thinking, but winter is not over yet. Each year, thousands of people suffer maiming or amputations of their fingers or hands due to improper handling of snow blowers. Michael Nancollas, MD, a board certified hand surgeon affiliated with Crouse Hospital, recommends that individuals take the proper precautions to prevent hand-related injuries while removing snow.



Dr. Michael Nancollas

"Snowblower injuries are usually very serious, often requiring delicate surgery followed by weeks or even months of rehabilitation," says Dr. Nancollas, a partner with Orthopaedics Associates of CNY. He reports seeing his share of this type of injury shortly after each Central New York snowstorm. "Most snow blower operators aren't aware that the impeller is only two inches below the opening of the discharge tube," cautions Dr. Nancollas.

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With proper safety techniques—and a dose of common sense—you can stay away from the hospital. Should you cut your finger or hand, bleeding from minor cuts will often stop on their own by applying direct pressure to the wound with a clean cloth. If continuous pressure does not slow or stop the bleeding after 15 minutes, get to the nearest emergency room. Other reasons to visit an ER are to update your tetanus protection, if necessary, or to check for tendon or nerve injury if motion or feeling is lost in the finger, says Dr. Nancollas.

To prevent hand injuries, Dr. Nancollas suggests the following safety tips if your snow blower jams:

- **Turn it OFF!**
- **Disengage clutch.**
- **NEVER put your hand down the chute or around the blades.**
- **Wait five seconds after shutting machine off to allow impeller blades to stop rotating.**
- **ALWAYS use a stick or broom handle to clear impacted snow. Never use your hand.**
- **Keep all shields in place. DO NOT REMOVE the safety devices on the machine.**
- **Keep a clear head, concentrate, and (this should go without saying) DO NOT DRINK alcoholic beverages before using your snow blower!**

