

July - Surviving the Heat

When temperatures reach 90 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, hazardous conditions can exist if you are overexposed to the heat. In our area of the country, we also see higher humidity which can add to the dangers associated with high temperatures. Heat related illnesses are preventable if you know the risks.

Heat is the #1 weather related killer in the United States. Heat causes more deaths per year than floods, lightning, tornados, and hurricanes combined, according to the National Weather Service.

Heat Illnesses

Heat Cramps

Heat cramps are the 1st sign that someone is becoming overheated. People will have a flushed looking appearance and body temperatures are nearing 102 degrees Fahrenheit.

Heat Exhaustion

Heat exhaustion is where the body loses water and salt through sweating. If proper fluids are not replaced in the body, the body cannot cool itself. This is a more dangerous situation.

For heat exhaustion, the CDC (Center for Disease Control) suggests providing a cool, nonalcoholic drink, rest in a cool place, a cool shower or sponge bath, an air-conditioned enclosure, and light clothing.

Heat Stroke

Heat stroke is the most severe heat related problem and can be life threatening. It occurs when the body can no longer regulate its temperature. The body's temperature rises, and permanent disability or death may result if emergency treatment is not immediately taken. There may be a lack of sweating noticeable at this point.

For heat stroke, the CDC suggests seeking shade or air conditioning for the victim. Cool the victim quickly by providing cool fresh water from a pool, shower, or garden hose. Monitor the victim's body temperature. Continue efforts to bring the body temperature down to 101-102 degrees Fahrenheit and notify emergency medical personnel immediately. You may contact the Hospital ER for instruction. Do not give a victim of heat stroke anything to drink unless directed to do so by a trained medical professional. Although signs and symptoms may vary, if you see signs of muscle cramping, body temperatures over 102 degree Fahrenheit, flushed looking appearance, fatigue, weakness, confusion, nausea or vomiting, or diarrhea, take immediate action.

Family Precautions

- Never leave children or pets inside a vehicle even if the windows are open slightly. The heat inside a vehicle rises very quickly. Always check the vehicle when walking away from it to make sure everyone is out of the vehicle.
- Schedule outdoor activities which require the greatest exertion during the early morning or evening hours when it is cooler.
- Know that your body has limits. If you are starting a new job or exercise program outdoors, start slowly so your body can adjust.

- Team up with others when it comes to surviving the heat. Monitor co-workers or family members who are outside or exposed to heat for long periods of time.
- Be flexible and adjust to the environment as needed. If you need to postpone activity and move indoors to rest, then make the changes to keep you safe.
- Certain people have a higher risk for heat related illnesses so pay attention to them. Infants, the elderly, people overweight, and people who have other prior medical conditions need monitored carefully.

Work Precautions

OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) provides guidelines for employers when it comes to heat related hazards. Employers have an obligation to help protect workers, and 1 important factor that employers must consider, according to OSHA, is the "heat index". The "heat index" takes into account, the temperature and humidity. The higher the "heat index", the hotter the weather will feel, and this can be a more accurate way to gauge heat related risks. There are Apps for smart phones that help employers monitor these risks, and when certain precautions will be triggered as a result of the higher "heat index" numbers.

Use Common Sense

- Apply sunscreen to exposed skin, and especially on children who are exposed to the sun. Make sure the sunscreen has a higher SPF number and use it according to directions.
- Dress in loose fitting and light weight clothing. Wear a brimmed hat and wear sunglasses when appropriate.
- Avoid overeating or large hot meals as they may add to your core body temperature.
- Do not forget about or neglect your family pets. Make sure they have adequate shade and plenty of water.
- Stay informed. Listen to local forecasts and learn how to protect you and your family.