



Protecting Your Child from Illness or Injury in Extreme Heat

Exposure to extreme heat can cause injury or serious illness such as heat stroke, heat exhaustion and heat cramps. The likelihood of injury or illness depends on several factors including temperature, humidity, physical activity, clothing, working and living conditions, and a person's age and state of health. The air temperature does not have to be extremely high for someone to experience heat emergencies such as heat exhaustion and heat stroke. Increased humidity can create dangerous heat emergencies even when the temperature is not that high. Heat-related illnesses in general are more likely to occur among people who have not been given time to adjust to extreme heat and who are accustomed to lower temperatures. Gradual exposure to heat gives the body time to become accustomed to higher environmental temperatures. Below are some tips for outdoor safety during hot weather events.

Prevention is the best plan...

- If possible, avoid being outside during the hottest part of the day, or for extended periods of time in extreme heat conditions.
- Avoid strenuous physical activity and exercise during extreme heat.
- Take frequent breaks in a cool or air-conditioned place.
- Encourage children to drink plenty of non-caffeinated fluids – even more than their thirst indicates.

Dress appropriately. Appropriate amounts and types of clothing are an important method of providing protection from heat-related illness and injury. Children should wear:

- A wide-brimmed hat to protect their face and head from direct sun.
- Loose-fitting, lightweight, light colored clothing.
- When outdoors, cover as much skin as possible with light clothing to avoid sunburn and apply sun block regularly.

Recognize the symptoms of Heat Exhaustion. Heat exhaustion typically occurs when people exercise heavily or work in hot humid places where body fluids are lost through heavy sweating. Heat exhaustion causes a mild form of shock and if not treated, the person's condition will worsen, possibly leading to heat stroke. Symptoms of heat exhaustion include the following:

- Cool, moist, pale or flushed skin
- Heavy sweating
- Headache
- Nausea
- Vomiting

- Dizziness and exhaustion
- Body temperature may be normal.

If you recognize any of the above symptoms, move the individual into a cool place, remove or loosen clothing, give cool water to drink and apply cool cloths to the skin. Let the person rest in a comfortable position and watch carefully for changes in his or her condition. If there is no improvement in their condition soon or if their condition worsens, seek medical attention immediately.

Recognize the symptoms of Heat Cramps. Heat cramps are muscular spasms that cause pain. They usually occur during heavy exertion. Although heat cramps are the least severe, they are often the first signal that the body is having trouble with the extreme heat.

Persons experiencing heat cramps should go to a cool place and rest in a comfortable position. Lightly stretch the affected muscle and encourage the individual to drink water to replenish body fluids.

Recognize the symptoms of Heat Stroke. Heat stroke is a medical emergency that can often be life threatening. Heat stroke may also be referred to as “sun stroke”. Seek medical attention immediately if you recognize any of the following symptoms:

- Hot, red skin
- Skin may be dry
- Change in consciousness
- Rapid, weak pulse
- Rapid, shallow breathing
- Body temperature can be very high (i.e. 105°)

Pay close attention to people with special health care needs. Exposure to heat can cause injury or serious illness such as heat cramps, heat exhaustion and heat stroke. These heat emergencies can occur quickly in children and especially in children with special health care needs, chronic illnesses (i.e. asthma and other respiratory conditions) and those with sensitivity to heat.

Information presented here has been compiled from the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, and the American Red Cross.