

Get the Facts: Extreme Heat

Summer is here and that means barbeques, baseball games and trips to the lake. While the higher temperatures are a welcome break from the rain we experienced the past few weeks, the Chicago Department of Public Health reminds residents to take basic precautions while enjoying themselves outdoors. Extreme heat and humidity are more than an inconvenience ---they are dangerous and in some cases can be deadly.

Who is at risk for heat related illness?

Those at greatest risk for heat related illness include infants and young children, people 65 years of age and older, people who are overweight, and people who have chronic medical conditions.

How can I prevent heat related illness?

It is important to stay hydrated, as your body loses fluids through sweat. Be sure to drink plenty of water and avoid alcohol, caffeine or sugary drinks, which also cause you to lose more body fluid. In addition, the following steps can be taken to help prevent heat related illness:

1. Keep your body cool. Take cool showers or baths if necessary.
2. Stay in air conditioned buildings as much as possible. If you don't have access to air conditioning, call 311 to find the nearest cooling center. DO NOT rely on a fan as your primary cooling source.
3. Be sure to monitor weather forecasts so you can plan your activities safely when it's hot outside. Avoid going out in the heat during the hottest part of the day.
4. If you do go out, wear light, loose-fitting clothing---and wear a hat to protect your head. Use sunscreen and reapply as directed on the package. If you're exercising or working outside, pace yourself and drink more water than usual and don't wait until you are thirsty to drink more. If possible, take breaks to cool off in an air conditioned room and always have a partner with you.
5. NEVER leave infants or children in a parked car. Nor should pets be left in parked cars---they can suffer heat-related illness too.
6. Check on your relatives, friends and neighbors and share these tips with them. The elderly, those who live alone, those who are ill and young children are most vulnerable to extreme heat and humidity.

What is Heat Stroke?

Heat stroke is the most serious heat-related illness. It occurs when the body becomes unable to control its temperature: the body's temperature rises rapidly, the sweating mechanism fails, and the body is unable to cool down. The telltale signs of heat stroke are:

- An extremely high body temperature, like 103 degrees or above
- Dizziness and nausea
- A throbbing headache and a pulse that is rapid and strong
- Skin that is red, hot and dry.

If you see someone suffering from heat stroke, take immediate action ---Call 911 right away then try to move the person into a cool, shady place.

What is Heat Exhaustion?

Heat exhaustion is a milder form of heat-related illness that can develop after several days of exposure to high temperatures and inadequate or unbalanced replacement of fluids.

Its symptoms can include:

- Heavy sweating
- Muscle cramps
- Weakness, fatigue and dizziness
- Headache, nausea and vomiting
- Fainting
- Breathing that is fast and shallow
- Skin that feels cool and moist
- A fast pulse

If you see someone suffering from heat exhaustion, help the victim to cool off and seek medical attention if symptoms continue.

For more information about extreme heat, visit:

<http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/index.asp>