

# Preventing Heat-Related Illness

## Overview

Extreme heat events happen when temperatures and/or the humidity is much higher than usual for a place given the time of year. People can suffer heat-related illnesses, especially when they are not able to cool themselves down.

This fact sheet offers tips for preventing, recognizing and treating heat-related health problems.

## Who is at risk

Anyone can suffer from heat-related illness, but are more at risk than others. Including:

- People 65 years of age or older
- Babies and young children
- Overweight people
- People doing manual labor or exercising outdoors
- People who are physically and/or mentally ill, especially those with heart disease or high blood pressure, or who take certain medications, such as for depression, insomnia, or poor circulation

Even young and healthy people can have a heat-related illness if they take part in intense physical activities during hot weather.

## Prevention

To protect your health when temperatures and humidity are high, remember to keep cool and use common sense. The following tips are important:

- **Stay Cool Indoors** – Visit air-conditioned places or take a cool shower
- **Drink Plenty of Fluids** – Drink lots of non-alcoholic drinks, no matter your activity level
- **Replace Salt and Minerals** – Have drinks such as sports drinks
- **Wear Appropriate Clothing and Sunscreen** – Choose lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing
- **Schedule Outdoor Activities Carefully** – Plan outdoor activity for morning and evening hours, when the temperature is not as high
- **Pace Yourself** – Work slowly if you are not used to working or exercising in hot and humid conditions

- **Pay Attention to Others** – Watch other people for illness caused by heat, since some people can become confused or lose consciousness when they are overheated
- **Do Not Leave Children or Animals in Cars** - Even in cool temperatures, cars can heat up to dangerous temperatures very quickly

### **Heat-related illness**

Heat-related illnesses can have different levels of risk and can include all of the following:

**Heat rash** and **sunburn** mainly affect the skin and usually do not require medical attention.

- **Sunburns** are red, painful, and unusually warm skin after being in the sun and can be treated by using moisturizing lotion, avoiding more time in the sun, and keeping the skin cool with cold compresses or cool water. Sunburns that are very bad or affect babies younger than 1 year of age may require medical attention.
- **Heat rash** looks like a group of red pimples or small blisters and can be treated by keeping the skin cool and dry.

**Heat cramps** are muscle pains or spasms, and can happen with intense physical activity as the body loses salts and fluids from sweating due to high temperatures. Heat cramps can be a symptom of heat exhaustion, and should be treated by stopping all activities for at least a few hours and drinking water plus juice or a sports beverage. If symptoms do not stop in 1 hour, seek medical attention.

Heat exhaustion and heat stroke are more dangerous heat-related illnesses.

- People with **heat exhaustion** can experience heavy sweating, tiredness, weakness, dizziness, headaches, feelings sick, vomiting, pale skin, or faint. Treatment of heat exhaustion includes drinking cool, non-alcoholic beverages, taking a cool shower, bath, or sponge bath, getting rest, moving to an air-conditioned place and changing into lightweight clothing. If symptoms are very bad, worsen, do not clear up after an hour, or if the person has heart problems or high blood pressure, seek medical attention. If heat exhaustion is not treated, and the person continues the activities, it may develop into heat stroke.
- **Heat stroke** happens when the body is unable to cool down. Symptoms include high body temperature (above 103°F, by mouth), red, hot, and dry skin (no sweating), rapid, strong pulse, throbbing headache, dizziness, feelings of sickness, confusion or unconsciousness. If a person is experiencing heat stroke, seek emergency medical attention immediately by calling 911 and begin to cool the individual. Cooling efforts should continue until medical attention arrives. Cool the person by getting them into shade, having them take a cool shower, bath or sponge bath, or using cool cloths. DO NOT give the person anything to drink.

**Resources**

CDC: [Extreme Heat and Your Health](#)

FEMA: [Extreme Heat](#)