

HSHS St. Elizabeth's Hospital Shares Tips for Staying Cool And Safe In A Heat Wave

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O'FALLON, IL - With the excessive heat warnings for the region, HSHS St. Elizabeth's Hospital wants the community to stay safe by providing tips for staying cool and how to know the warning signs of heat-related illnesses, like heat stroke, which require medical attention.

St. Elizabeth's Chief Medical Officer Dr. Vinay Bhooma said, "Strenuous activity in hot weather or prolonged exposure to a hot environment are often the causes of heat stroke. Both lead to a rise in core body temperature which becomes dangerous at 103 degrees or higher."

Heat stroke is considered a medical emergency. If a person exhibits symptoms of a heat stroke, call 911 right away. Symptoms include:

- High body temperature (103 degrees or higher)
- Hot, red, dry or damp skin
- Fast, strong pulse
- Headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Confusion
- Losing consciousness

Move the person to a cooler place after calling 911. You can also help lower the person's temperature with cool cloths or a cool bath. It is not recommended that the person be given anything to drink.

"Heat exhaustion is also common during a heat wave. Symptoms include heavy sweating, fast but weak pulse, nausea or vomiting, dizziness, headache and passing out," added Dr. Bhooma. If you or others experience these symptoms, it is recommended to move to a cool place, sip water, loosen your clothes and put cool, wet cloths on your body to cool down. Seek medical help right away if you or someone else is vomiting, symptoms get worse or the symptoms last longer than one hour.

It is important to stress that heat-related illnesses are preventable if people stay cool and stay hydrated. Other safety tips include:

- Wear appropriate clothing
- Stay cool indoors
- Don't be outside if you don't have to be
- If you must be outdoors, pace yourself and take breaks
- Wear sunscreen
- Avoid hot and heavy meals
- Drink more fluids, regardless of your activity
- Don't wait to drink water until you're thirsty
- Stay away from very sugary or alcoholic drinks

Certain people are at higher risk for heat-related illnesses. This includes infants and young children, people 65 and older, people who are overweight, and people who are physically ill. If a person experiences a heat-related illness, it is common for them to lose consciousness. If you know someone in any of these categories, make sure to check on them at least twice a day during a heat wave.

Another reminder is to never leave children or pets alone in a closed vehicle. Each year, dozens of children and pets die from being left in unattended vehicles across the country. Additionally, studies have found that leaving windows cracked does not significantly slow the heating process or decrease the maximum temperature measured inside the vehicle.

Resources and more information on cooling centers in the area can be found at www.211helps.org/cooling-sites/ or www.keepcool.illinois.gov. To ensure a site is operating during the time needed, the public is encouraged to call ahead of time.