

American Red Cross Urges Caution As Heat Indices Rise

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ST. LOUIS - With hot temperatures and high humidity on the horizon, the American Red Cross of Missouri and Arkansas urges residents to take precautions against the heat.

According to the National Library of Medicine, extreme heat causes more deaths than any other weather-related hazard, killing 12,000 people living in the U.S. each year. In addition, the CDC reports that more than 65,000 people visit an emergency room in the U.S. for acute heat illness every summer.

Everyone is at risk when temperatures rise above 90 degrees; and the elderly and the very young are most susceptible to heat and heat-related illnesses. Heat-related illnesses can cause serious injury and even death if unattended. Signs of heat-related illnesses include nausea, dizziness, flushed or pale skin, heavy sweating and headaches. Persons with heat-related illness should be moved to a cool place, given cool water to drink and ice packs or cool wet cloths should be applied to the skin. If a victim refuses water, vomits or loses consciousness, call 9-1-1 or your local emergency number immediately.

Red Cross Heat Wave Safety Tips:

- **Prepare.** Discuss heat safety precautions with members of your household. Have a plan for what to do if the power goes out.
- **Dress for the heat.** Wear loose-fitting, lightweight, light-colored clothing. Avoid dark colors because they absorb the sun's rays. It is also a good idea to wear hats or to use an umbrella.
- **Stay hydrated.** Carry water or juice with you and drink continuously even if you do not feel thirsty. Avoid drinks with alcohol or caffeine, which dehydrate the body.
- **Eat small meals and eat more often.** Avoid high-protein foods, which increase metabolic heat.
- **Slow down and avoid strenuous activity.** If you must do strenuous activity, do it during the coolest part of the day, which is usually in the morning between 4 and 7 a.m. Take frequent breaks.
- **Stay indoors when possible.** If air-conditioning is not available, stay on the lowest floor out of the sunshine. Remember that electric fans do not cool, they simply circulate the air.
- **Be a good neighbor.** During heat waves, check in on family, friends and neighbors who are elderly or ill and those who do not have air conditioning. Check on your animals frequently, too, to make sure they are not suffering from the heat.
- **Learn Red Cross first aid and CPR/AED.**

Know What These Heat-Related Terms Mean:

- **Heat cramps:** Heat cramps are muscular pains and spasms that usually occur in the legs or abdomen. They are caused by exposure to heat and humidity, and loss of fluids. Heat cramps are an early signal that the body is having trouble with the heat.
- **Heat exhaustion:** Heat exhaustion typically occurs when people exercise heavily or work in a hot, humid place where body fluids are lost through heavy sweating. Blood flow to the skin increases, causing blood flow to decrease to the vital organs. This results in a form of mild shock. If not treated, the victim may suffer heat

stroke. Signals of heat exhaustion include cool, moist, pale flushed or red skin; heavy sweating; headache; nausea or vomiting; dizziness; and exhaustion. Body temperature will be near normal.

- **Heat stroke:** Also known as sunstroke, heat stroke is life-threatening. The victim's temperature-control system, which produces sweat as a way of cooling the body, stops working. Body temperature can rise so high that brain damage and death may result if the body is not cooled quickly. Signals include hot, red and dry skin; changes in consciousness; rapid, weak pulse; and rapid, shallow breathing.

General Care for Heat Emergencies:

- **Heat exhaustion:** Get the person to a cooler place and have him or her rest in a comfortable position. If the person is fully awake and alert, give half a glass of cool water every 15 minutes, and have the person drink slowly. Remove or loosen tight clothing and apply cool, wet cloths to the skin. Fan the person. Call 9-1-1 or the local emergency number if the person refuses water, vomits or loses consciousness.
- **Heat stroke:** Heat stroke is a life-threatening situation! Help is needed fast. Call 9-1-1 or your local emergency number. Move the person to a cooler place. Quickly cool the body. Wrap wet towels or sheets around the body. Use a water hose, if available, to cool the victim. Watch for signals of breathing problems. Keep the person lying down and continue to cool the body. If the victim refuses water or is vomiting or there are changes in the level of consciousness, do not give anything to eat or drink.