

Saint Anthony's Provides Summer Safety Tips

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ALTON – The dog days of summer are upon us. There are several health related issues to be aware of but one of the number one concerns is monitoring your body's reaction to heat.

The leadership at OSF Saint Anthony's Emergency Department; Dr. Rodger Hanco, Emergency Services Medical Director; and Nikki Brunaugh, Director of Emergency Services, would like to remind community members to exercise extra caution when temperatures spike.

It's important to be aware of some of the body's warning signs and take appropriate actions if necessary, says Dr. Hanco:

- **Heat cramps**, usually in the legs and stomach, are generally accompanied by fever and nausea. The cramps are brought on by the loss of body salts and water through perspiration. If possible, get in the shade or a cool spot and drink plenty of water or a sports drink that replenish your electrolytes – **no alcohol or energy drinks**.
- **Heat exhaustion** – the body temperature and blood pressure can drop, skin turns clammy and cool, the face pales and the pulse weakens. An individual with heat exhaustion is usually wringing wet with perspiration, especially on their face and forehead. Heat exhaustion is a step away from heat stroke and should be taken seriously. Remove the sufferer from the situation – go somewhere cool and slowly lower their body temperature.
- **Heat Stroke** is a medical emergency. **Call 911**. Heat stroke is the most dangerous consequence of unbearable heat, also known as sunstroke: sweating stops, the skin becomes dry and hot, the face flushed, the pulse rapid. Heat stroke victims often slip into unconsciousness. If a heat stroke continues without medical attention, death or permanent disabilities are possible.

“Extreme heat levels are more likely to affect the very young, the elderly and those with chronic illnesses,” Dr. Hanco added. “If you are taking medications, make sure you’re aware of how they affect your body’s ability to handle the higher temperatures.”

"If someone is suffering from heat exhaustion, the best thing to do is to get them into a cool environment, elevate their feet and give them some water. You should contact the person's doctor or call the Emergency Room if you have any questions," said Brunaugh. "The high temps and humidity can cause the situation to spiral out of control rapidly. Listen to your body. If you are unsure about the situation, seek help immediately."

Brunaugh added some additional summer health concerns like: sunburns, insect bites, operating summer equipment, food poisoning, fireworks and boating safety. Follow these safety tips:

- Avoid excessive exposure or strenuous outdoor exercise when the sun's rays are most severe – between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m.
- Be sure to replace lost fluids – water is the best! If you’re going to be sweating excessively, make sure to increase your water intake to compensate.
- When working or playing outside, avoid wearing perfumes, flower-printed clothing and always wear shoes to prevent insect bites.

- Avoid playing with fireworks. They create a serious risk for burns, eye injuries and other hazards. You cannot control the flight of a bottle rocket – leave it to the professionals. For children, sparklers burn at extremely high temperatures – use caution.
- Keep picnic food cool. When you are enjoying your summer picnic, remember that anything that has mayonnaise, dairy, or eggs in it and any meat products can become contaminated with bacteria after only a couple of hours of being unrefrigerated.
- For sunburns, bathe in cool water and drink plenty of fluids. Call your physician if the burn is severe or the person is feverish and ill.
- Do not drink while boating, and make sure to wear a life vest. Drinking and boating is every bit as dangerous as drinking and driving. And if your swimming in the river, take into consideration the currents and drop offs.

“If you aren’t sure about a situation, let a medical professional check it out,” said Dr. Hanko. “We’re fortunate to live in an area where so many outdoor activities are available. If you remain alert to the warning signs, you and your loved ones can enjoy your summer and avoid a trip to the emergency room.”

If you have any questions about heat-related health conditions, please call OSF Saint Anthony’s Emergency Department at 618-474-6260.