

TEXAS HEAT: PREVENTING HOT WEATHER ILLNESS

Hot weather is part of the Texas summer. During prolonged heat waves, the risk of heat-related illnesses, injuries and deaths climbs dramatically.

According to the health experts, one of the most dangerous factors during excessively hot weather is the addition of humidity. The combination of heat and humidity results in heat stress on humans and animals by interfering with the body's ability to cool itself through sweating. Victims of prolonged or high heat can develop heat cramps, or heat exhaustion. If heating continues, the condition can progress to heat stroke and death.

How can you avoid heat illness?

During excessive heat be sure to do the following:

1. Drink two to five times more water and non-sugar, non-alcoholic beverages to replace fluids lost in perspiration.
2. Wear loose-fitting, lightweight, light-colored clothing and wide brimmed hats while in the sun.
3. Use sunscreen with an SPF15 or more.
4. Take frequent breaks limiting physical activity. Rest in a cool place.
5. Stay in an air conditioned area if possible. If no air conditioning is available, fans are helpful.
6. Use the buddy system between co-workers in high heat jobs.
7. Older people should have a friend or relative check on them or call twice a day.
8. When planning activities choose cooler hours to be outdoors.
9. Before prolonged work or exercise outdoors, listen to weather forecasts and give special attention to advisories.

What are the symptoms of Heat Exhaustion?

The warning signs of heat illness can be mild or severe, but all are important danger signals. Signs of heat exhaustion include:

1. profuse sweating
2. paleness
3. muscle cramps
4. tiredness
5. weakness
6. dizziness
7. headache
8. nausea or vomiting
9. a weak but rapid pulse
10. fast and shallow breathing
11. fainting

What are the symptoms of heat stroke?

Heat exhaustion can progress to heat stroke. Heat stroke occurs when the body's cooling system fails. Sweating stops, and body temperature can exceed 106°F.

Symptoms of heat stroke include:

1. extremely high body temperature (usually 105°F orally)
2. red and dry skin
3. failure to sweat
4. rapid pulse
5. throbbing headache
6. dizziness
7. nausea
8. confusion
9. seizures
10. unconsciousness

Coma, paralysis and death can follow if emergency treatment is not immediately given.

Heat can be fatal to anyone, but people over 60 appear to be at highest risk for death from heat illness, especially if they are frail or have pre-existing heart disease, respiration problems or diabetes. To a lesser extent, babies and young children, people with a history of alcoholism and other using certain drugs and medications are at high risk of heat illness. People most at risk of heat illness from exertion may include: athletes, military personnel, manual laborers.

How can you help someone with heat exhaustion?

Help the victim gradually cool off with water or non-alcoholic, caffeine-free drinks. Other measures include cool showers, rest in an air-conditioned place and wearing less clothing.

How can you help someone with heat stroke?

Get the victim to the shade or a cooler area, call 9-1-1 for emergency medical assistance and use any means to start cooling the body, such as spraying with water or fanning vigorously. Continue efforts until the victims temperature drops to 101°F – 102°F.

Source: Texas Department of Health, Division of Emergency Preparedness