

Prevention of Heat-Related Illness

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Heat-related illnesses and deaths are preventable. People suffer heat-related illness when their bodies are unable to cool down properly, especially in high temperatures and high humidity. People at greatest risk for heat-related illness are the elderly, the very young, people with acute/chronic illness, those with cognitive impairments, and people taking certain medications. Agencies should activate heat-related plans of action when external temperatures reach 80°, and continue with implementation as temperatures rise.

Taking Precautions:

- Be aware of the heat, and modify or reschedule outdoor activities accordingly.
- Stay in air conditioned areas whenever possible and stay in the shade when outdoors.
- Drink plenty of fluids, limit caffeine, and eat well-balanced, light, and regular meals.
- Wear loose fitting, lightweight, and light-colored clothing.
- When indoors, use window coverings to help keep the inside areas cool.
- Be aware that fans do not provide cooling—they only move hot air around.

Types of Heat-Related Illnesses:

Heat Exhaustion – a milder form of heat-related illness. Signs and symptoms include:

- Heavy sweating, paleness, skin may feel cool.
- Muscle cramps, fatigue, weakness.
- Dizziness, headache, fainting, nausea or vomiting.
- Pulse rate may be fast and weak, and breathing may be fast and shallow.

Heat Stroke – this is a **medical emergency**. When a person's body temperature rises to a dangerous level, it can lead to vital organ damage and death. Signs and symptoms include:

- An extremely high body temperature (above 103 °F).
- Red, hot, dry skin, and absence of sweating.
- Rapid, strong pulse rate, throbbing headache, dizziness, nausea or vomiting.

Immediate Steps to Take:

- If heat stroke is suspected or a person is exhibiting extreme symptoms of heat exhaustion—contact Emergency Medical Services (EMS) immediately.
- Get the person to a cool, shady area, and attempt to cool them down with cool water applied to the skin. Monitor body temperature, if possible.
- Give fluids if person is alert and able to swallow.
- Seek medical follow-up for milder heat-related illness as soon as possible.

Training should be provided for all appropriate staff in prevention and recognition of heat-related illnesses. For more information, please visit: www.health.ny.gov/publications/1243/.

Please contact OPWDD at people.first@opwdd.ny.gov should you have questions or concerns about the information in this alert or suggestions for future alerts.