



MIDDLESEX COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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FACT SHEET

Extreme Heat Illness and Prevention (Heat Stroke and Heat Exhaustion)

What is heat stroke?

Heat stroke is the most serious heat-related illness and it occurs when the body is unable to cool down. Heat stroke can cause death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not provided.

Who is at greatest risk of heat-related illness?

Although anyone at any time can suffer from heat-related illness, some people are at greater risk than others. Check regularly on:

- Infants and young children
- People aged 65 or older
- People who have a mental illness
- Those who are physically ill (especially with heart disease or high blood pressure)

Other conditions related to risk include: Obesity, fever, dehydration, poor circulation, sunburn, and prescription drug and alcohol use.

What are the warning signs of heat stroke?

Warning signs vary but may include the following:

- An extremely high body temperature (above 103 degrees Fahrenheit, orally)
- Red, hot and dry skin (no sweating)
- Rapid, strong pulse
- Throbbing headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Confusion
- Unconsciousness

If you see any of these signs, you may be dealing with a life-threatening emergency. Have someone call for immediate medical assistance while you begin cooling the victim. Do the following:

- Get the victim to a shady area.
- Cool the victim rapidly using whatever methods you can. For example, immerse the victim in a tub of cool water; place the person in a cool shower; spray the victim with cool water from a garden hose; sponge the person with cool water; or if the humidity is low, wrap the victim in a cool, wet sheet and fan him or her vigorously.
- Monitor body temperature and continue cooling efforts until the body temperature drops to 101-102°F.
- If emergency medical personnel are delayed, call the hospital emergency room for further instructions.
- Do not give the victim fluids to drink.
- Get medical assistance as soon as possible.

What is heat exhaustion?

Heat exhaustion is a milder form of heat-related illness. It is the body's response to an excessive loss of the water and salt contained in sweat that can develop after several days of exposure to high temperatures and inadequate or unbalanced replacements of fluids.

What are the warning signs of heat exhaustion?

Warning signs of heat exhaustion include the following:

- Heavy sweating
- Paleness
- Muscle cramps
- Tiredness
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Nausea or vomiting
- Fainting

The skin may be cool and moist. The victim's pulse rate will be fast and weak and breathing will be fast and shallow. If heat exhaustion is untreated, it may progress to heat stroke. Seek medical attention immediately if any of the following occurs:

- Symptoms are severe
- The victim has heart problems or high blood pressure

Otherwise, help the victim to cool off and seek medical attention if symptoms worsen or last longer than 1 hour.

Cooling measures that may be effective include the following:

- Cool, nonalcoholic beverages
- Rest
- Cool shower, bath, or sponge bath
- An air-conditioned environment
- Lightweight clothing

How can I protect myself, others, and pets from extreme heat?

To protect the health of yourself, others, and pets when temperatures are extremely high, remember to keep cool and use common sense. The following tips are important:

- Stay cool indoors
 - Air-conditioning is the number one protective factor against heat-related illness and death
 - If your home does not have air-conditioning, call your local Police Department, Office of Emergency Management, or Health Department to see if there are Cooling Centers in your area.
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Do not drink liquids that contain alcohol, or large amounts of sugar
- Provide cool water for your pets
- Avoid hot foods and heavy meals
- Replace salts and minerals
- Wear lightweight, light-colored, loose fitting clothing
- Wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses if you go outdoors
- Apply sunscreen (SPF 15 or higher) 30 minutes prior to going outside and reapply according to package directions
- Limit sun exposure during mid-day hours
- Pace yourself
- Do not wait in or leave infants, children, or pets in a parked car
- Use a buddy system
- Monitor those at high risk

Source of information: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/>