

AMERICAN RED CROSS URGES CAUTION DURING HEAT WAVE

The Elderly and the Very Young are the Most Susceptible to Heat Illness

As summer delivers hot temperatures and high humidity, the American Red Cross urges residents to take precautions against the heat in order to protect themselves and their families from heat-related illnesses.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 400 Americans die each year due to summer's sweltering heat. In recent years, excessive heat has caused more deaths than all other weather events, including tornadoes, floods and hurricanes.

Everyone is at risk when temperatures rise above 90 degrees; and the elderly, the very young, and those with medical conditions 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.

As temperatures continue to rise, keep the following safety tips and heat-related information in mind:

Red Cross Heat Safety Tips:

- **Dress for the heat.** Wear lightweight, light-colored clothing. Light colors reflect away some of the sun's heat. Also, it is a good idea to wear a hat or to use an umbrella.
- **Use sunblock.** Avoid skin damage and protect yourself from harmful UV rays.
- **Drink water.** Staying hydrated is one of the easiest ways to avoid heat-related illness. Carry water or juice with you and drink continuously, even if you do not feel thirsty.
- **Eat small meals and eat more often.** Avoid high-protein foods which increase metabolic heat.
- **Avoid strenuous activity.** If you must engage in laborious activity, try to do so in the early morning, when the temperatures are coolest, between 4 and 7 a.m. During prolonged sun exposure, take frequent breaks.
- **Stay indoors when possible.** If air-conditioning is not available, stay on the lowest floor out of the sunshine.
- **Watch out for family and friends.** Keep an eye out for those who spend much of their time alone or who are most likely to be affected by heat. Never leave children or pets alone in enclosed vehicles.
- **Be a good neighbor.** During heat waves, check on elderly neighbors in your neighborhood. Additionally, look out for those who do not have air-conditioning.

- **Learn Red Cross CPR and first aid.** Though the above tips can help prevent an emergency situation, you should be prepared in the case that one does arise.

Understand These Heat-Related Terms:

- **Heat cramps:** Heat cramps are muscular pains and spasms that result from heavy exertion. These are not serious, but are early signs that the body is having trouble with the heat.
- **Heat exhaustion:** Heat exhaustion typically occurs when body fluids are lost through heavy perspiration. This excessive sweating can result from over-exertion of the body through exercise or work. With heat exhaustion, blood flow to the skin increases causing the flow to the vital organs to decrease. This results in the form of mild shock and can lead to heat stroke (see below). Signs include cool, moist, pale, flushed or red skin; profuse sweating; headache; nausea or vomiting; dizziness; and exhaustion.
- **Heat stroke:** Heat stroke is life-threatening; help is needed fast! The victim's temperature control system, which produces sweat to cool the body, stops working. When this happens, the body temperature can increase so much that brain damage or even death can result if the body is not cooled quickly. Signs include hot, red and dry skin; alterations in consciousness; rapid or weak pulse; and rapid or shallow breathing.

General Care for Heat Emergencies:

- **Heat cramps or heat exhaustion:** Relocate the victim 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. Do not let him or her drink too quickly. Do not give liquids that contain alcohol or caffeine. Remove or loosen tight clothing and apply cool, wet cloths, such as towels or sheets. If the person refuses water, vomits or loses consciousness, call 9-1-1 immediately.
- **Heat stroke:** Heat stroke is a life-threatening situation and help is needed fast! Call 9-1-1 immediately. Relocate the victim to a cooler place and quickly cool the body – immerse victim in a cool bath, or wrap wet sheets around the body and fan it. Watch for signals of breathing difficulties. Keep the person lying down and continue to cool the body any way you can. 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.

Red Cross training can give you the skills and confidence to act in an emergency. For more information regarding issues involving excessive heat issues contact the American Red Cross in your local area.