

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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NEWS RELEASE

Extra precautions needed to avoid heat illnesses

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health advises the public to be especially vigilant about the warning signs of heat illnesses. National Weather Service offices again have issued heat advisories for much of the state because of high temperatures and high heat indices.

Heat-related illnesses occur when the body's temperature control system is overloaded. The Alabama Department of Public Health cautions everyone to be alert to the warnings that may signal help is needed.

Heat stroke, sometimes called sunstroke, is the most serious heat-related illness. It occurs when the body becomes unable to control its temperature. The body's temperature rises rapidly, the sweating mechanism fails, and the body is unable to cool down. Body temperature may rise to 106 degrees F or higher within 10 to 15 minutes. Heat stroke can cause death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not provided.

"You can help save a life by watching for the symptoms of heat-related emergencies and assisting when they are observed," Dr. Jim McVay, director of the Bureau of Health Promotion and Chronic Disease, said. "A person with heat stroke is likely to be unconscious or unresponsive, so he or she cannot safely consume any liquids. Never give any alcohol to a person with heat stroke or any heat illness."

People should drink plenty of water, stay in an air-conditioned room, and keep out of the sun. The public should also check on the elderly and ensure pets have plenty of water to drink and shade to cool off.

Warning signs of heat stroke vary, but include the following:

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

First aid recommendations are to get the person to a shady area, cool rapidly in a tub of cool water, place in a cool shower, spray with cool water from a garden hose, splash with cool water, or, if the humidity is low, place in a cool, wet sheet and fan vigorously. Monitor body

temperature and continue cooling efforts until the person's body temperature drops to 101 to 102 degrees F. If emergency medical personnel are delayed, call a hospital emergency room for further instructions.

Follow these preventive measures to avoid heat illnesses:

- Drink more fluids, and avoid beverages containing alcohol or caffeine.
- When temperatures are extreme, stay indoors, ideally in an air-conditioned place.
- Take a cool shower or bath, and reduce or eliminate strenuous activities during the hottest times of the day.
- Protect yourself from the sun with a wide-brimmed hat, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing and use of a sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher.
- Never leave pets or people in a parked vehicle.

Those at special risk of becoming ill in this weather are young children, the elderly and individuals with heart problems, poor circulation, diabetes, a previous stroke or obesity. The risk of heat-related illness may increase among people using medications for high blood pressure, nervousness or depression.

Information about heat illnesses is available at adph.org/injuryprevention/.