



Tarrant County Public Health

“Safeguarding our community’s health”

The Facts About Heat Illness

Exposure to even short periods of extreme heat can cause serious health problems. Here are signs and some tips to cope:

Heat Stroke

Heat stroke occurs when the body is unable to regulate its core body temperature. It rises rapidly, the sweating mechanism fails and the body is unable to cool down. Heat stroke can cause death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not provided. The warning signs vary, but may include:

- An extremely high body temperature (above 103°F, orally) • Rapid, strong pulse • Red, hot and dry skin (no sweating) • Throbbing headache • Confusion • Nausea • Vomiting

Heat Exhaustion

Heat exhaustion is a milder form of heat-related illness that can develop after several days of exposure to high temperatures and the inadequate or unbalanced replacement of fluids. The skin may be cool and moist, the patient’s pulse rate will be fast and weak, and breathing will be fast and shallow. It is the body’s response to an excessive loss of the water and salt contained in sweat. Those most prone to heat exhaustion are the elderly, people with high blood pressure and people working or exercising in a hot environment. Warning signs of heat exhaustion include:

- Heavy sweating • Paleness • Muscle cramps • Tiredness • Weakness

Heat Cramps

Heat cramps are muscle pains or spasms—usually in the abdomen, arms, or legs—that may occur in association with strenuous activity. Heat cramps usually affect people who sweat a lot during strenuous activity. This sweating depletes the body of salt and moisture. The low salt level in the muscles causes painful cramps. Heat cramps may also be a symptom of heat exhaustion. If you have heart problems or are on a low-sodium diet, get medical attention for heat cramps. If medical attention is not necessary, take these steps:

- Stop all activity • Sit quietly in a cool place • Drink clear juice or a sports beverage • Do not return to strenuous activity for a few hours after the cramps subside • Seek medical attention for heat cramps if they do not subside in one hour

Keep Cool

Staying cool during extreme summer temperatures is the best prevention of heat illness. Any of the symptoms or conditions listed above can lead to dangerous conditions, so it is advised to consult with a medical provider. You should also:

- Seek a cool, shaded environment • Drink only non-alcoholic beverages, as directed by a physician
- Take a cool shower, bath or sponge bath • Stay inside an air-conditioned environment • Wear lightweight comfortable clothing

In the instance of heat stroke, emergency medical assistance should be requested as soon as possible.

For more information, call 817-321-4700 or visit <http://health.tarrantcounty.com>

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