

Health officials encourage Minnesotans to stay cool this week and avoid heat-related illness

Young athletes and older Minnesotans among those most at risk

While storms and floods may get more attention, in a typical year extreme heat kills more people in the U.S. than any other weather phenomenon. With that in mind, health officials urge Minnesotans to take steps to avoid heat-related illness during the unusually hot and humid conditions forecast in the coming days.

Extreme heat can cause health problems ranging from heat rash and cramps to life-threatening conditions like heatstroke. Heat exhaustion is a common heat-related illness. Signs and symptoms of heat exhaustion include dizziness, thirst, fatigue, headache, nausea, vomiting, weakness and confusion. Untreated heat exhaustion can lead to heatstroke.

According to Infectious Disease Epidemiology, Prevention and Control Division Medical Director Raj Mody, athletes and people working outside face a higher risk for heat-related illness.

“Extreme heat can be dangerous, especially for older people and children and young adults playing sports like soccer and football,” Dr. Mody said. “The heat can overwhelm the ability of the body to keep its temperature at 98 degrees Fahrenheit, and that can lead to serious problems. That’s why it is so important to take precautions to avoid overheating.”

MDH offers the following tips for staying cool and safe during extremely hot weather:

1. Stay Cool

- Electric fans will not prevent heat-related illness when temperatures are very hot, so use air conditioning or spend time in air-conditioned locations during extremely hot weather
- If you plan to exercise outdoors, consider doing it in the morning before temperatures rise
- Limit time outdoors, and take frequent breaks if you must be outside
- Wear loose fitting, light-colored clothes
- Take a cool bath or shower
- Don’t leave kids or pets alone in cars, even for just a few minutes and with windows down

2. Stay Hydrated

- Drink plenty of fluids, especially water
- Do not wait until you’re thirsty before you drink fluids
- Avoid excessive caffeine, alcohol, drinks high in sugar, and very cold drinks (they can cause stomach cramps)

3. Stay Informed and Connected

- Listen to the local news for the weather forecast
- Learn about the symptoms of heat-related illnesses, watch for symptoms, and carry out preventative measures if you see warning signs of illness
- Check on your neighbors, friends and family—especially the elderly and/or those with underlying health issues

“We urge people to plan ahead to stay cool and hydrated,” said MDH Climate and Health Program Supervisor Kristin Raab. “Take care of yourself and take care of others, especially those who are at higher risk.”

More information is available at www.health.state.mn.us and in the MDH Extreme Heat Toolkit at <http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/climatechange/docs/mnextremeheattoolkit.pdf>

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