

COUNTY HEALTH MATTERS

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When is it too hot?

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Recently, excessive heat has not been much of an issue. It seems that the temperatures this summer have been cooler than normal. Even as I write this article, the temperature outside is only 90° F. At first glance, that does not appear to be excessively hot, however, the heat index right now is 107° F. In other words, if you factor in the humidity, it feels like 107° outside.

High heat index levels can be very dangerous to our health. Excessive heat can cause a person to suffer from a heat related illness, damage vital organs, and even cause death. Children and the elderly are at the highest risk. Children are of special concern, because they often don't understand when they are getting too hot.

If the HEAT INDEX is 105 or greater, ALL outdoor activities should be cancelled or rescheduled. In addition, friends, relatives, or neighbors should frequently check on people who may be at risk, such as the elderly or young children. People should seek out air-conditioned places such as shelters, stores, or other people's homes to escape the heat.

If the heat index is between 95 and 105, extra precautions need to be followed in order to protect people from heat related illness. Some of these precautions would include: drinking plenty of fluids (water or sport-drinks), wearing light colored loose-fitting clothing, scheduling breaks during outdoor activities, using sunscreen or umbrellas, and limiting outdoor activities.

Heat related illness usually comes in three stages. It can start with heat cramps, then proceed to heat exhaustion, and finally heat stroke can occur. Please consider the following symptoms and treatments for each stage of heat related illnesses.

Heat cramps can be in the form of painful cramps, especially in the legs. Heat cramps can also be associated with flushed-moist skin, and a mild fever (usually less than 102.) Some of the first aid treatments for heat cramps would include: moving to a cool place, resting, removing excess clothing, applying cool wet cloths, drinking cool water or sport drinks, and stretching cramped muscles slowly. Seek medical attention if cramps do not go away in one hour. If a person passes out, vomits, or refuses water, call 9-1-1 immediately.

Heat exhaustion can be associated with heavy sweating, pale-cool-moist skin, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, headache, fatigue, weakness, feeling faint, fast & shallow breathing, and a fast & weak pulse rate. A person with heat exhaustion may not feel hot to the touch. The first aid treatments for heat exhaustion would include: moving to a cool place, resting, removing excess clothing, drinking cool water or sport drinks, seeking air-conditioning, and taking a cool shower or bath. If a person passes out, vomits, or refuses water, call 9-1-1 immediately.

The symptoms of heat stroke would include: warm-dry skin, rapid heart rate, fast & shallow breathing, passing out, vomiting, headache, fatigue, confusion, agitation, lethargy, stupor, seizures, coma, and even death is possible. The first aid treatments for heat stroke would include: CALL 9-1-1, MEDICAL HELP IS NEEDED FAST, remove excess clothing, drench skin with cool water, fan skin, place ice bags on the armpits, wrists, ankles, neck, and groin areas. Make sure to keep the victim lying down and monitor their airway. If EMS is delayed, call the hospital ER for further instructions.

To find heat index information, pay attention to news reports or consult the internet. One such website would be <http://www.wunderground.com/US/MO/Warrenton.html>. A high heat index can be very dangerous. Please be mindful of the heat index especially in regards to children outdoor activities and elderly persons. It is also crucial to remember to never leave anyone unattended in a closed car! This can lead to serious injury or even death!

If you would like more information about heat safety, please call the Warren County Health Department at (636)456-7474 or visit our website at <http://warren.lphamo.org>.