

## **Take Precautions to Avoid Heat-Related Illness**

The Memphis and Shelby County Health Department monitors health trends in our community, including heat-related illnesses. Because heat-related illness may cause death, the Health Department is advising everyone to be aware of the signs and symptoms of heat-related illness, take precautions, and check on neighbors and co-workers who may be exposed to the summer heat.

The risk of heat illness greatly increases when the heat index reaches 100 degrees or higher. The heat index is a measure of how hot it feels when relative humidity is added to the actual air temperature. For example, if the temperature is 90 degrees Fahrenheit and the humidity is 60 percent, the heat index is 100 degrees. When the heat index is high, prolonged exposure to outdoor temperatures or physical activity can cause heat exhaustion, heat cramps or heat stroke, which can be fatal. Because the heat index has reached or exceeded 100 degrees several times in the past few weeks, the Health Department advises everyone, especially those who work or play outside, or work in facilities without air-conditioning to take precautions to avoid heat-related illnesses, including heat stroke and heat exhaustion.

### **Heat Stroke:**

Heat stroke is the most serious heat-related illness. Body temperature rises rapidly and the body loses its ability to sweat, which is its natural cooling mechanism. Individuals suffering heat stroke can register body temperatures of 106°F or higher. Heat stroke can cause death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not provided.

Signs and Symptoms of Heat Stroke:

- High body temperature (above 103 degrees)
- Red, hot, dry skin (no sweating)
- Rapid, strong pulse
- Throbbing headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea

### **Heat Exhaustion:**

Heat exhaustion is a milder form of heat-related illness that can develop after several days of exposure to high temperatures and inadequate or unbalanced replacement of fluids.

### **Signs and Symptoms of Heat Exhaustion:**

- Heavy sweating
- Muscle cramps
- Tiredness
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Nausea or vomiting
- Fainting
- Skin may be cool and moist
- Pulse rate: fast and weak
- Breathing: fast and shallow

### **These simple precautions can prevent heat-related illness:**

- Remain indoors in an air-conditioned room during the hottest part of the day.

- If you do not have air-conditioning in your home, go to a mall, community center, library or other public building during the hottest part of the day.
- When in a closed space like a car without air-conditioning, open windows for ventilation. Never leave children or pets in a parked car, even for just a few moments.
- Avoid physical exertion outside in hot temperatures, especially during the middle of the day.
- Monitor children for signs of heat distress when they are playing outside.
- If you work outdoors in the heat or in a building without air-conditioning, take frequent rest breaks in a cool, shady place or in an air-conditioned room.
- If you work in a facility with no air-conditioning, not only take frequent breaks in an air-conditioned room and drink plenty of water but it is also important to keep an eye on your co-workers. Heat related illnesses can sneak up on you, so be aware of the signs and symptoms.
- If you exercise outside, do so in the early morning or late evening hours when the temperatures are cooler.
- Drink extra fluids, preferably at least 8 ounces of water, fruit juice or sports drinks each hour.
- Avoid alcohol and beverages with caffeine, especially energy drinks.
- Wear light-colored, loose, lightweight clothing to reflect the heat and allow air to circulate around the body.
- Take a cool shower or bath.
- Check frequently on elderly relatives and neighbors, especially those who may not have adequate air-conditioning.

For more information about heat-related illnesses, contact the Memphis and Shelby County Health Department's Epidemiology Section at (901) 544-7717, Monday through Friday during regular business hours.