

DHSS Urges Residents to Avoid the Health Dangers of Extreme Heat

With temperatures expected to reach nearly 100 today and tomorrow, the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) urges residents to take steps to avoid heat exhaustion and heat stroke.

“Heat stroke is a life-threatening condition and heat exhaustion can also require hospital care,” said Health and Senior Services Commissioner Poonam Alaigh, M.D. “When the weather turns extremely hot and humid, it’s vital to drink plenty of fluids, spend time in cool places and reduce or reschedule any physical activity. And please remember to check on elderly family members and neighbors to make sure they are safe.”

Prolonged heat and humidity can present a serious health hazard, especially for young children, the elderly and persons taking certain medications.

To avoid health complications from excessive heat:

- Drink plenty of water or other non-alcoholic beverages.
- Make sure children and the elderly are drinking water, and ensure that persons with mobility problems have adequate fluids in easy reach.
- If you do not have air conditioning, spend time in air-conditioned places such as libraries, movies, malls or other public buildings during the hottest hours of the day. Check with your municipality to see if cooling centers are available.
- Wear loose and light-colored clothing. Wear a hat when outdoors.
- Avoid any outdoor activity during the hottest hours of the day. Reduce physical activity or reschedule it for cooler times of the day.
- Don't leave children, a frail elderly or disabled person, or pets in an enclosed car -- not even for a minute -- as temperatures can quickly climb to dangerous levels.
- Talk to your health care provider about any medicine or drugs you are taking. Certain medications -- such as tranquilizers and drugs used to treat Parkinson's disease -- can increase the risk of heat-related illness.

People suffering heatstroke can go from appearing normal to extremely ill in a matter of minutes. Victims may have hot, dry skin, a high body temperature of 106 degrees or more, an absence of sweat, and a rapid and strong pulse. Victims may become delirious or unconscious. Persons suffering from heatstroke need **immediate medical attention**.

Heat exhaustion is a milder illness that may take several days of high temperatures to develop. Victims may have pale, clammy skin and sweat profusely. They may feel tired, weak or dizzy and have headaches or sometimes cramps, but their body temperature will remain close to normal.

Each year more than 1,200 persons are treated in New Jersey emergency departments for heat-related illness or sunburn. Overexposure to summer heat causes between 45 and 170 hospitalizations in New Jersey annually depending on the average outdoor temperature. The majority of those hospitalized in New Jersey are male, aged 65-84, and are hospitalized for 3 or more days.

For more information on preventing heat-related illness, please visit the DHSS web site at www.nj.gov/health/eoh/hhazweb/cool.htm.

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