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Wayne Holmes Emergency Coalition

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Watch Out for Summer Overheating!

Warm weather means outdoor activities and fun under the sun, but be careful not to let an emergency spoil the day.

The body keeps itself cool by letting heat escape through the skin and evaporating sweat (perspiration). If the body loses too much water from sweating or not getting enough fluids, a victim can become dehydrated and suffer a heat related illness.

Anyone can be susceptible. Overheating and dehydration can become serious or be fatal if unattended.

Preventing Heat-Related Dehydration

- Dress for the heat. Wear lightweight, light-colored clothing. Wear a hat or use an umbrella for shade.
- Wearing sunscreen and a hat that shades your head, neck, ears, and face. Sunburn stops your body from cooling itself down properly and can lead to skin cancer.
- Drink water. Carry water or juice with you and drink continuously--even if you do not feel thirsty. Avoid alcohol and caffeine which dehydrate the body.
- Hydrate ahead of your activity. Drink one and one half cups of water 20–30 minutes before playing or exercising in the heat. Then drink at least one-and-a-half cups of water every half hour while moving.
- Avoid using salt tablets unless directed to do so by a physician.
- Slow down. Avoid strenuous activity. If you must do strenuous activity, do it during the coolest part of the day, which is usually in the morning between 4:00 and 7:00 a.m.
- Take regular breaks when engaged in physical activity on warm days.

Know the Stages of Heat-Related Dehydration

- **Heat/Muscle Cramps.** Heat cramps are muscular pains and spasms due to heavy exertion. They usually involve the abdominal muscles or the legs. It is generally thought that the loss of water and electrolytes from heavy sweating causes the cramps.

- **Heat Exhaustion** is less dangerous than heat stroke. It typically occurs when people exercise or work in a warm, humid place where body fluids are lost through heavy sweating. Fluid loss causes blood flow to decrease in the vital organs, resulting in a form of shock. With heat exhaustion, sweat does not evaporate as it should resulting in the body not cooling properly. Symptoms include cool, moist, pale, flushed, or red skin; heavy sweating; headache; nausea or vomiting; dizziness; and exhaustion. Body temperature will be near normal.

Treating Heat Cramps or Heat Exhaustion. Get the person to a cooler place and have him rest in a comfortable position. If the person is awake and alert, give a half glass of cool water every 15 minutes. Do not let them drink too quickly. Do not give liquids with alcohol or caffeine in them as they can make conditions worse. Remove or loosen tight clothing and apply cool, wet cloths such as towels or wet sheets. Call 9-1-1 or the local emergency number if the person refuses water, vomits, or loses consciousness.

- **Heat Stroke.** Also known as sunstroke, heat stroke is **life-threatening**. The victim's temperature control system, which produces sweating to cool the body, stops working. The body temperature can rise so high that brain damage and death may result if the body is not cooled quickly. Symptoms include hot, red, and dry skin; changes in consciousness; rapid, weak pulse; and rapid, shallow breathing. Body temperature can be very high--sometimes as high as 105° F. This late stage of a heat-related illness is life threatening. Call 9-1-1 or the local emergency number.

To Treat for Heat Stroke: Help is needed fast. Call 9-1-1 or your local EMS number. Move the person to a cooler place. Quickly cool the body by wrapping it in wet sheets and fanning it. If you have ice packs or cold packs, wrap them in a cloth and place them on each of the victim's wrists and ankles, in the armpits, and on the neck to cool the large blood vessels. Never use rubbing alcohol. Watch for symptoms of breathing problems, keep the airway clear and keep the person lying down.

This information has been brought to you by the Wayne/Holmes Emergency Coalition. For topic ideas or further questions, go to our website: www.whec.org.

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