



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Adjust your activities to avoid heat-related illnesses

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health advises the public to be alert to the warning signs of heat-related illnesses. Heat-related illnesses occur when the body's temperature control system is overloaded. The Alabama Department of Public Health cautions everyone to be alert to the warnings that may signal help is needed.

Heat stroke, sometimes called sunstroke, is the most serious heat-related illness. It occurs when the body becomes unable to control its temperature. The body's temperature rises rapidly, the sweating mechanism fails, and the body is unable to cool down. Body temperature may rise to 106 degrees F or higher within 10 to 15 minutes. Heat stroke can cause death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not provided.

People should drink plenty of water, stay in an air-conditioned room, and keep out of the sun. The public should also check on elderly relatives, neighbors and friends, and ensure pets have plenty of water to drink and shade to cool off. Everyone needs to adjust their activities and be alert to warnings that signal help is needed.

Warning signs of heat stroke vary, but include the following:

- An extremely high body temperature (above 103 degrees F)
- Red, hot and dry skin (no sweating)
- Rapid, strong pulse
- Throbbing headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Confusion
- Unconsciousness

First aid recommendations are to get the person to a shady area, cool rapidly in a tub of cool water, place in a cool shower, spray with cool water from a garden hose, splash with cool water, or, if the humidity is low, place in a cool, wet sheet and fan vigorously. Monitor body temperature and continue cooling efforts until the person's body temperature drops to 101 to 102 degrees F. If emergency medical personnel are delayed, call a hospital emergency room for further instructions.

"Heat stroke is a life-threatening emergency," said Dr. Jim McVay, director of the Bureau of Health Promotion and Chronic Disease. "A person with heat stroke is likely to be unconscious or unresponsive, so he or she cannot safely consume any liquids. Under no circumstance should you give any alcohol to a person with heat stroke or any heat-related illness."

Follow these preventive measures to avoid heat-related illnesses:

- Drink more fluids, and avoid beverages containing alcohol or caffeine.
- When temperatures are extreme, stay indoors, ideally in an air-conditioned place.
- Take a cool shower or bath, and reduce or eliminate strenuous activities during the hottest times of the day.
- Protect yourself from the sun with a wide-brimmed hat, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing and use of a sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher.
- Never leave pets or people in a parked vehicle.

Individuals with heart problems, poor circulation, diabetes, a previous stroke or obesity are at greater risk of becoming sick in hot weather. The risk of heat-related illness may increase among people using medications for high blood pressure, nervousness or depression.

The heat can be deadly. The department's Center for Health Statistics has recorded these numbers of heat-related deaths in Alabama in recent years: 2011, 7; 2012, 7; 2013, 8; and 2014, 5. The provisional number of heat-related deaths in 2015 was 9.

For more information, visit adph.org/injuryprevention/.