



**American  
Red Cross**

## **RED CROSS HEAT SAFETY TIPS HELP KEEP PEOPLE COOL**

### *People Urged to Prepare for the Heat of Summer Season*

Contact: Bill Harrison  
804-780-2256 (O)

**Richmond, VA.** - With higher than normal temperatures predicted for much of the country, the American Red Cross urges people to prepare for the heat of the summer season. When temperatures climb over 90 degrees and remain there for several days, people, especially the very young and the very old, become susceptible to heat and heat-related illnesses which can cause serious injury and even death.

Signs of heat-related illnesses include nausea, dizziness, flushed or pale skin, heavy sweating and headaches. Victims should be moved to a cool place, given cool water to drink and ice packs or cool wet cloths should be applied to the skin. If a victim refuses water, vomits or loses consciousness, dial 9-1-1 immediately.

The Red Cross advises the following tips on how to stay cool:

#### **IN THE HOT WEATHER . . .**

- Dress for the heat. Wear lightweight, light-colored clothing. Light colors will reflect away some of the sun's energy. Wear a hat or use an umbrella.
- 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.
- Eat small meals and eat more often. Avoid foods that are high in protein, which increase metabolic heat.
- 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 a.m. and 7:00 a.m.
- Stay indoors when possible.

#### **KNOW WHAT THESE HEAT-RELATED TERMS MEAN**

- Heat wave: More than 48 hours of high heat (90 F or higher) and high humidity (80 percent relative humidity or higher) are expected.
- Heat index: A number in degrees Fahrenheit that tells how hot it really feels with the heat and humidity. Exposure to full sunshine can increase the heat index by 15 F.
- Heat 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 salt from heavy sweating causes the cramps.
- Heat exhaustion: Heat exhaustion is less dangerous than heat stroke. It typically occurs when people exercise heavily 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, possibly because of high humidity or too many layers of clothing. As a result, the body is not cooled properly. Signals include cool, moist, pale or flushed skin; heavy sweating; headache; nausea or vomiting; dizziness; and exhaustion. Body temperature will be near normal.

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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. Signals include hot, red and dry skin; changes in consciousness; rapid, weak pulse; and rapid, shallow breathing. Body temperature can sometimes be very high.

#### **GENERAL CARE FOR HEAT EMERGENCIES**

**1. Cool the Body**

**2. Give Fluids**

**3. Minimize Shock**

- Heat cramps/heat exhaustion: Get the person to a cooler place and have him or her rest in a comfortable position. Give a half glass of cool water every 15 minutes. Do not let him or her 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.
- Heat stroke: Heat stroke is a life-threatening situation! Help is needed fast. Call 9-1-1 or your local EMS number. Move the person to a cooler place. Quickly cool the body. Wrap wet sheets around the body and fan 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. (Do not use rubbing alcohol because it closes the skin's pores and prevents heat loss.) Watch for signals of breathing problems and make sure the airway is clear. Keep the person lying down.

**For free brochures on heat exposure or to enroll in a Red Cross first aid and CPR course**, contact the Red Cross, Greater Richmond Chapter at 780-2250 or the Chapter's web site: [www.greaterrichmond.redcross.org](http://www.greaterrichmond.redcross.org).

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