

Experts tell how to beat the heat

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Officials with the Galveston County Health District urged area residents to use caution and common sense when dealing with the heat.

“Prevention is the best defense against heat-related illness and death,” Dr. Mark Guidry, the health district’s chief executive, said. “Staying cool, drinking plenty of fluids, wearing cool clothing and pacing outdoor activities are keys to staying healthy in hot weather.”

The elderly, the very young, those who are sick and those without access to air conditioning are affected most severely. Children left in closed vehicles, even for a short period of time, are also at great risk, health officials said.

Dehydration and heat illness can result if a person does not replace fluids lost during perspiration.

Symptoms of heat illness include heavy sweating, muscle cramps, weakness, dizziness, nausea, weak but rapid pulse and headaches. People with these symptoms should find shade, drink water slowly and make sure there is good ventilation.

If fluids are not replaced soon enough, heat stroke can result, potentially leading to brain damage or death.

Symptoms of heat stroke include extremely high body temperature, red and dry skin, rapid pulse, confusion and loss of consciousness.

Anyone with those symptoms should be taken immediately to medical treatment.

Staying in an air-conditioned area — either at home or in a public place such as a mall, library or recreation center — is the most effective way to fight heat, officials said.

If air conditioning is not available, pull the shades over the windows and use cross ventilation and fans to cool rooms.

A cool shower or bath also is an effective way to cool off, officials said.

Limiting the use of stoves and ovens can lower the temperature in a house.

Children can quickly become dehydrated in hot weather.

They need to drink fluids frequently, especially water, and wear light-colored, loosefitting clothes, officials said.

Health officials also recommended avoiding drinks that are heavily sweetened or contain caffeine.

Check on children often, especially if they are playing outside in high temperatures, officials said.

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Taking Precautions

- Never leave a person or pet in a closed, parked vehicle in hot weather, even for a short time.

- Drink plenty of fluids, but avoid drinks with alcohol, caffeine or a lot of sugar. Don't wait until you are thirsty. Start drinking fluids at least 30 minutes before going out.
- Plan strenuous outdoor activity for early morning or evening when it's cooler and wear an insect repellent to avoid insect bites.
- Take frequent breaks when working outside.
- At the first signs of heat illness move to a cooler location, rest a few minutes and slowly drink a cool liquid. Seek medical attention immediately if conditions do not improve.
- Eat more frequently but be sure meals are well balanced, cool and light.
- Check frequently on the elderly, the ill and others who may need help.
- Adjust to the environment. A sudden change in temperature – an early heat wave or travel to a hotter climate – will be stressful to the body. Limit physical activity until you become accustomed to the heat.
- Check with a doctor or pharmacist about the effects of sun and heat when taking prescription medications, especially diuretics or antihistamines.

Source: Galveston County Health District