



REMINDER: Heat-Related Illnesses

Description of Issue and Importance

Heat-related illnesses can be very serious and even fatal if not treated quickly. Individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) may be more prone to heat-related illnesses due to difficulty communicating how they feel and medications including psychotropic and diuretic medications.

Heat stroke is a life threatening crisis caused when the body overheats. It usually occurs in hot, humid places and when an individual is dehydrated.

Signs include:

- Body temperature over 104 degrees
- Lack of sweating
- Hot dry skin
- Rapid or very slow pulse
- Confusion
- Seizures
- Unconsciousness.

Contributing factors include:

- Overdressing
- Prolonged sun exposure
- Poor circulation
- Medications that limit the ability to sweat



Heat exhaustion is a warning sign that the body is getting too hot. It occurs when the body begins to overheat and body fluids are lost through sweating.

Signs include:

- Sweating
- Clammy skin
- Rapid breathing
- Dry mouth
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Muscle cramps
- Nausea
- Headache
- A weak or rapid pulse

Recommended Action and Prevention Strategy

1. Air conditioning is the best way to prevent heat-related illness, even a few hours a day will help.
2. If you believe someone is experiencing heat stroke, call 911 immediately. Cool the individual. Get them to a shady area. Loosen clothing. Apply cool or tepid water to the skin and fan them. Elevate the feet above the head if possible. DO NOT give beverages to an individual who is too confused to drink.
3. Treatment for heat exhaustion includes rest, cool drinks, loosened or lightweight clothing, cool shower, and air-conditioning. Massage muscle cramps. Seek medical attention if symptoms worsen or last more than an hour.

References

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2011). Warning signs and symptoms of heat-related illness. Retrieved 09/11/2015 from:

<http://www.cdc.gov/extremeheat/warning.html>

United States Department of Labor: Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Heat-related illnesses and first aid. Retrieved 09/11/2015 from:

https://osha.gov/SLTC/heatstress/heat_illnesses.html