

# Preparing You for Emergencies: Heat Emergencies

Let's make sure that we are prepared for emergencies by understanding the impact of summer heat.

## Extreme heat

Extreme temperatures can pose serious and potentially fatal health problems. Heat-related illnesses can be prevented by staying cool and drinking plenty of liquids. According to the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), extreme heat causes more weather-related deaths in the U.S. than all other forms of severe weather combined.



## What is a "heat advisory?"

The [National Weather Service](#) issues a heat advisory when a heat index of 105 to 115 is expected for at least three hours a day, or if nighttime lows are expected to remain above 80 for at least two consecutive nights.

## Who is at risk from heat-related illnesses?

In a heat wave, the majority of victims are typically older individuals and other people with pre-existing and chronic medical conditions. Others at greater risk from extreme temperatures include pregnant women, children, people who are taking certain regular medications, individuals who work in a high-heat environment, people engaged in strenuous physical activity and people who are mentally ill. However, even young, healthy individuals are susceptible.

## What problems can arise from heat?

Two major types of heat-related illness exist. Heat exhaustion is non-life-threatening; heat stroke is potentially fatal.

## What are the signs of heat exhaustion?

Early warning signs of heat exhaustion include decreased energy, slight loss of appetite, faintness, light-headedness and nausea. People with these symptoms should seek a cool place, drink fluids (non-alcoholic), remove excess clothing and rest. Heat stress needs attention, but it is not a medical emergency. Untreated heat exhaustion can and mostly likely will develop into the potentially fatal condition, heat stroke.

## What are the signs of heat stroke?

Serious signs that indicate a medical emergency and require immediate medical attention include unconsciousness, rapid heartbeat, throbbing headache, dry skin, chest pain, mental confusion, irritability, vomiting, diarrhea, muscle cramps, staggering and difficulty breathing. In an emergency dial 911, move the heat-stressed person to a cool area and remove his or her excess clothing. Spray the individual with water and fan him or her until help arrives.

## **What can you do to reduce the risk of heat-related illness?**

Air conditioning is the best defense against extreme heat, even for just a few hours a day. Taking a cool shower or bath can also provide some relief. People engaging in outdoor activities during this type of weather should have access to shade, water and/or sports beverages, cooling areas, and sunscreen.



## **Watching out for your neighbor**

Heat illnesses are insidious and the victim may not even realize they're in extreme danger. Cases have been documented where elderly people living in un-air-conditioned homes have put on layers and layers of clothing and died of hyperthermia. These individuals are unable to determine that they are hot and actually think they are cold.

Be a good neighbor or family member. During periods of high heat check on elderly and infirm neighbors and family members. A simple phone call or visit might save a life.

To watch a one minute video on preparing you for heat go to:

<http://www.soph.uab.edu/scphp/default.aspx?ID=746>

