

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

What to Do to Beat the Heat!

Coldwater, MI. Each year more people in the United States die from extreme heat exposure than from hurricanes, lightening, tornadoes, floods, and earthquakes combined. On average, approximately 300 people die each year from exposure to heat. The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency recommends that everyone understand the warning signs of heat illness and take special care of those at risk. "Older Americans and young children are at particular risk for heat illness," says Rebecca Burns, Health Officer for the tri-county health department. "When heat advisories or warnings are issued, take a few extra minutes to check on your neighbors, friends, and family to ensure their health and safety."

People suffer heat-related illness when their bodies are unable to compensate and properly cool themselves. The body normally cools itself by sweating. When the humidity is high, sweat will not evaporate as quickly, preventing the body from releasing heat quickly. Other conditions related to risk include:

- Age (the elderly and young children),
- Obesity,
- Illness – i.e., fever, dehydration,
- Heart disease,
- Mental illness,

- Poor circulation,
- Sunburn,
- Prescription drug use, and
- Alcohol use.

"Many people think electric fans are sufficient during extreme heat," adds Burns. "However, while fans may comfort by circulating the air they will not prevent heat-related illness when the temperature is in the high 90s."

Heat Stroke and Heat Exhaustion

Heat stroke occurs when the body is unable to regulate 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. Warning signs of heat stroke vary but may 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; and unconsciousness.

Heat exhaustion is a milder form of heat-related illness that can develop after several days of exposure to high temperatures and inadequate or unbalanced replacement of fluids. Those people most prone to heat exhaustion are the elderly, people with high blood pressure, and people working or exercising in a hot environment. The warning signs of heat exhaustion include: heavy sweating, paleness, muscle cramps, tiredness, weakness, dizziness, headache, nausea or vomiting, and fainting. The skin may be cool and moist. The pulse rate will be fast and weak, and breathing will be fast and shallow. If heat exhaustion is untreated, it may progress to heat stroke.

Tips for Preventing and Managing Heat

- Take a cool shower or bath.

- Drink more fluids (nonalcoholic), regardless of your activity level. Don't wait until you're thirsty to drink. (Warning: If your doctor generally limits the amount of fluid you drink or has you on water pills, ask him or her how much you should drink while the weather is hot.)
- Don't drink liquids that contain caffeine, alcohol, or large amounts of sugar - these actually cause you to lose more body fluid. Also, avoid very cold drinks, because they can cause stomach cramps.
- Stay indoors and, if at all possible, stay in **an air-conditioned place**. If your home does not have air conditioning, consider going to a shopping mall, senior center, the movie theatre, the public library or for a drive in an air-conditioned car – even a few hours spent in air conditioning can help your body stay cooler when you go back into the heat.

If you must be out in the heat:

- Limit your outdoor activity to morning and evening hours.
- Cut down on exercise. If you must exercise, drink two to four glasses of cool, nonalcoholic fluids each hour. A sports beverage can replace the salt and minerals you lose in sweat.
- Try to rest often in shady areas.
- Protect yourself from the sun by wearing a wide-brimmed hat (also keeps you cooler) and sunglasses, and put on sun screen of SPF 15 or higher (the most effective products say "broad spectrum" or "UVA/UVB protection" on their labels).

Additional tips:

- Wear lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing.
- NEVER leave anyone or a pet in a closed, parked vehicle.
- Check regularly on those at greatest risk of heat-related illness:
 - Infants and young children
 - People aged 65 or older
 - People who have a mental illness

- Those who are physically ill, especially with heart disease or high blood pressure

Visit adults at risk at least twice a day and closely watch them for signs of heat exhaustion or heat stroke. Infants and young children, of course, need much more frequent watching.

The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health has posted a FAQ on its website titled "Hot Weather Health Emergencies." To access this FAQs or many others, just go to www.bhsj.org and click on the '**Quick Info About Health Topics**' button at the top on the left side bar; or call or stop in at one of our 3 locations:

Branch County
570 N. Marshall Rd.
Coldwater, MI 49036
(517) 279-9561, ext. 0106#

Hillsdale County
20 Care Drive
Hillsdale, MI 49242
(517) 437-7395, 0311#

Three Rivers
1110 Hill St.
Three Rivers, MI 49093
(269) 273-2161, 0233#

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