

SUN POISONING / HEAT EXPOSURE

Preventing Heat Related Illnesses

From 1979 –2002, excessive heat exposure caused 8,966 deaths in the United States. During this period, more people in this country died from extreme heat than from hurricanes, lightning, tornadoes, floods, and earthquakes combined. Because most heat-related deaths occur during the summer, and because weather projections for this year indicate a hotter-than-average summer, people should be aware of who is at greatest risk and what actions can be taken to prevent a heat-related illness or death. At greater risk are the elderly, children, and people with certain medical conditions, such as heart disease. However, even young and healthy individuals can succumb to heat if they participate in strenuous physical activities during hot weather.

What is Heat Stroke?

Heat stroke (or sun stroke) is the most severe form of heat-related illness and causes several hundred deaths in the United States each year. Heat stroke occurs when a person's body temperature exceeds 105 degrees Fahrenheit. Heat stroke is often accompanied by confusion and can progress to coma and death unless treated by rapidly lowering the body temperature. If you believe that someone has heat stroke, call for emergency medical treatment or have that person taken to the hospital immediately.

What is Heat Exhaustion?

Heat exhaustion occurs when people exercise heavily or work in a work in a warm, humid place where body fluids are lost through heavy sweating. Heat exhaustion is characterized by cold, pale, clammy skin, and may include fainting and vomiting. If someone appears to be suffering from heat exhaustion, he or she must be moved to a cool area out of direct sunlight and sponge bathed with cool water. Give sips of water every 15 minutes for one hour.

What are Heat Cramps?

Heat cramps are painful spasms, usually in the legs and abdomen, that result from heavy exertion and sweating. To relieve heat cramps, apply firm pressure on cramping muscles or gently massage them. As in the case of heat exhaustion, give sips of water every 15 minutes for one hour.

What is Sun Poisoning?

Sun poisoning is a terrible fire-hot sunburn that constantly hurts like your skin is ripping off. Other symptoms that can occur with sun poisoning are:

- > blistering/peeling
- > vomiting
- > persistent chills
- > fever
- > rapid heartbeat

It is imperative to get the person medical attention. Here are some things you can do until medical personnel arrive:

- > Get the person to a cool place
- > Try to give sips of cool water or water mixed with 1 tsp baking soda (be careful if there is vomiting - otherwise water may be inhaled into the lungs).
- > Elevate legs and lower the head to get the blood back to the heart and pumping into the brain.
- > Lightly cover the victim, but do not use a heavy blanket - this will raise the temperature too high.

Preventive Measures

If you know you are going to be spending a lot of time in the sun, drink more fluids, wear lightweight, light-colored clothing, wear a hat or use an umbrella, use a sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher, and eat small meals. When temperatures are extreme, stay indoors, ideally in an air-conditioned place.

Contact Us

To receive more information, call or visit us at:

Clinton County Health Department
Health Services Unit
133 Margaret Street
Plattsburgh, NY 12901
Tel: (518) 565-4848