

Patient Education



Extreme Heat Prevention

Deaths and illnesses from heat are preventable. Every year, many people react to “extreme heat” (when it is very hot outside).

Deaths caused by heat are preventable. The elderly, the very young and people with mental illness and chronic diseases are at highest risk. Young and healthy individuals can be affected by heat if they do activities during hot weather.

Our bodies are not made for the heat – keep it cool!

People get sick from the heat when their bodies cannot properly cool. The body normally cools itself by sweating. In some conditions sweating is not enough and a person’s body temperature rises fast. Very high body temperature may harm the brain and other vital organs.

Factors affecting the body’s ability to cool itself during hot weather:

- When humidity is high, sweat will not leave as quickly and the body does not release heat as fast.
- Age.
- Obesity.
- Fever.
- Dehydration.
- Heart disease.
- Mental illness.
- Poor blood circulation.
- Sunburn.
- Prescription drug.
- Alcohol use.

What is extreme heat?

Conditions of extreme heat are when the summertime temperatures are far more hot and/or more humid (air is thick and sticky) than the average (the normal weather for where you are located and during that time of year).



Weather Spark (taken from the website www.weatherspark.com) says that the “Average Temperatures” for the Muskoka region are:

- “The warm season lasts from May 23 to September 17 with an average daily high above 66°F. The hottest day of the year is July 23, with an average high of 77°F and low of 58°F.”

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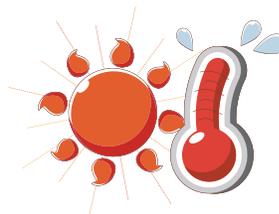
What causes extreme heat?

- Humid or muggy conditions cause an area of high pressure in the atmosphere to trap hazy, damp air near the ground.
- Very dry and hot weather conditions make “dust storms” and it is hard to see in. “Droughts” occur when it is very dry outside for a long time with little-to-no water.
- **Hot temperatures (heat wave) mixed with drought is a very dangerous situation.**

How to keep cool during extreme heat:

Protect yourself and your health when it is very hot outside.

- ✓ **Drink plenty of fluids** – During any exercise, do not wait until you are thirsty to have a drink. During heavy exercise, in a hot environment make sure you are properly hydrated. 
- ✓ **Give your body the salt and the minerals that it needs** – Sweating a lot removes the salt and minerals from your body. It is important to replace the salt and minerals and a “sports beverage” can do this. If you are on a low-salt diet, talk with your doctor before drinking a sports beverage or taking a salt tablet.
- ✓ **Wear appropriate clothing and sunscreen** – Choose light in weight, light in colour and clothing that fits loosely. If you go outdoors protect from the sun by wearing a big hat, sunglasses and sunscreen of SPF 15 or greater (put on 30 minutes before going outside and reapply as directed on bottle). Your body will have a hard time trying to cool itself when you have a sunburn and you will lose body fluids. It is important to protect yourself. 
- ✓ **Plan activities outside around the weather** – If you go outside, limit your outdoor activity to morning and evening hours. Take a break often in shady areas so that your body can cool down.
- ✓ **Take your time-** If you are not used to working or exercising in the heat, start slow and pick up the pace a little at a time. If activity in the heat makes your heart beat fast and you are having a hard time breathing STOP the activity immediately and move to a cool area.



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- ✓ **Stay indoors-** In “extreme heat” it is the best to stay indoors in an air-conditioned place. If your home does not have air conditioning, go to the local mall, arena or library. Even a few hours spent in the cool will keep your body temperature lower for when you go back to the heat. Call your local health care to see if your community has a station available to get out of the heat and into the cool (heat-relief station).



- ✓ **Take cool showers or baths –** This will lower body temperature.
- ✓ **Do not cook meals with your oven when it is hot –** This will cause more heat in your home during the already-hot conditions.

- ✓ **Have a buddy system to check on each other –** Check often how a co-worker or a friend feel and have them check how you feel too. Getting sick from the heat may cause a person to become confused or lose consciousness.



- ✓ **It is important to monitor those at “high risk” –** Check on people that are older, very young/infant, physically ill, overweight or have a mental illness to make sure they are keeping cool too.
- ✓ **Do not leave infants, children, pets or anyone in cars –** Even a cool vehicle will heat up very quickly in “extreme heat”. Anyone left in the car is “at risk” for becoming sick from the heat or even death. Always check to make sure everyone is out of the car when you leave it.

- ✓ **Know the symptoms of getting sick from the heat (heat-related illnesses).**



Warning signs for heat-related illnesses / What do to when you are sick

Even short periods of high temperatures can cause serious health problems. Listen for health and safety updates from your local weather channel and news. It is important to know the symptoms/warning signs of becoming sick from the heat.

The following chart shows the type of illness, symptoms /warning signs and what to do in the case of a heat-related illness.

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Illness	Symptoms/Warning signs	What to do
Heat stroke	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A very high body temperature (above 103°F, orally). • Red, hot and dry skin (no sweating). • Fast, strong pulse. • Throbbing headache. • Dizzy. • Nausea. • Confusion. • Unconsciousness. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Call for medical assistance right away. 2. Do not give person who is sick fluids to drink. If vomiting, turn them on to their side. 3. Take the person who is sick to a shaded area. 4. Cool the person quick by placing them in a tub of cool water, cool shower, cool water from a hose, or other way available. 5. Check their body temperature and continue to cool the body temperature until it drops to 101-102°F 6. If emergency assistance is not there yet, call the hospital emergency room for more instructions.
Heat exhaustion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavy sweating. • Pale skin. • Muscle cramps. • Tiredness. • Weakness. • Dizziness. • Headache. • Nausea or vomiting. • Fainting. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If symptoms are severe, or the person who is sick has heart problems or high blood pressure, get medical attention. 2. Have cool, nonalcoholic drinks. 3. Rest. 4. Have a cool shower, bath or sponge bath. 5. Get them in an air-conditioned room. 6. Change in to clothing that is light in weight.
Heat cramps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Muscle pains or spasms – usually in the abdomen (stomach area), arms or legs that come when exercising hard. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If you have heart problems or on a low-sodium diet, get medical attention. 2. Otherwise, stop all activity and sit quietly in a cool place. 3. Drink clear juice or a sports beverage. 4. Do not return to hard activity for a few hours after the cramps get better because it may lead to heat exhaustion/ heat stroke. 5. Get medical attention for heat cramps if the cramps do not go away in 1 hour.

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Illness	Symptoms/Warning signs	What to do
Sunburn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skin is red, painful and abnormally warm after being in the sun. • Consult a doctor if the sunburn affects an infant younger than 1 year of age if these symptoms are present: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Fever. ▶ Fluid-filled blisters. ▶ Severe pain. 	<p>Tips for treating a sunburn:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do not have sunburn exposed to the sun (do not repeat exposure). 2. Apply cold cloth on the sunburn or cover/place the sunburn in cool water. 3. Apply moisturizing lotion to sunburn. Do not use salve, butter or ointment. 4. Do not break blisters that form.
Heat rash	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heat rash looks like a red group of pimples or small blisters. • It is more likely to be on the neck and upper chest, in the groin, under the breasts and in elbow creases. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The best treatment for a heat rash is to be in a room/place that is cool and not humid. 2. Keep the rash dry. 3. Dusting powder may make your rash more comfortable. 4. Treating a rash is simple and does not require medical attention.

Information in this handout was adapted from NCEH's Health Studies Branch.

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