



Public Health Fact Sheet

Boston Public Health Commission
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HEAT-RELATED EMERGENCIES

To protect your health when temperatures are extremely high, remember to keep cool and use common sense.

TAKE THE FOLLOWING PRECAUTIONS TO AVOID HEAT-RELATED EMERGENCIES:

1. Do Not Leave Children or Pets in Cars

Even in cool temperatures, cars can heat up to dangerous temperatures very quickly. Even with the windows cracked open, interior temperatures can rise almost 20 degrees Fahrenheit within the first 10 minutes. Anyone left inside is at risk for serious heat-related illnesses or even death. Children who are left unattended in parked cars are at greatest risk for heat stroke, and possibly death. When traveling with children, remember to do the following:

- Never leave infants, children, or pets in a parked car, even if the windows are cracked open.
- To remind yourself that a child is in the car, keep a stuffed animal in the car seat. When the child is buckled in, place the stuffed animal in the front with the driver.
- When leaving your car, check to be sure everyone is out of the car. Do not overlook any children who have fallen asleep in the car.

2. Drink Plenty of Fluids, making sure to avoid alcoholic beverages and liquids high in sugar or caffeine. During hot weather you will need to increase your fluid intake, 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 how much you should drink while the weather is hot.

3. Wear Appropriate Clothing and Sunscreen

Choose lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing. Although we know small amounts of sun exposure can be beneficial for Vitamin D, overexposure can lead to dangerous sunburn. Sunburn affects your body's ability to cool itself and causes a loss of body fluids. It also causes pain and damages the skin. If you must go outdoors, protect yourself from the sun by wearing a wide-brimmed hat (also keeps you cooler) along with sunglasses, and by putting on sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher (the most effective products say "broad spectrum" or "UVA/UVB protection" on their labels) 30 minutes prior to going out. Continue to reapply it according to the package directions.

4. Stay Cool Indoors

Stay indoors and, if at all possible, stay in an air-conditioned place. If your home does not have air conditioning, go to the shopping mall or public library - even a few hours spent in air conditioning can help your body stay cooler when you go back into the heat. Call the Mayor's 24-hour Hotline at 617-635-4500 to find a heat-relief shelter in your neighborhood. Electric fans may provide comfort, but when the temperature is in the high 90s, fans will not prevent heat-related illness. Taking a cool shower or bath or moving to an air-conditioned place is a much better way to cool off. Use your stove and oven less to maintain a cooler temperature in your home.

5. Schedule Outdoor Activities Carefully

If you must be outdoors, try to limit your outdoor activity to morning and evening hours. Try to rest often in shady areas so that your body's thermostat will have a chance to recover.

6. Pace Yourself

If you are not accustomed to working or exercising in a hot environment, start slowly and pick up the pace gradually. Make sure to rest often in shady areas. If exertion in the heat makes your heart pound and leaves you gasping for breath, STOP all activity. Get into a cool area or at least into the shade, and rest, especially if you become lightheaded, confused, weak, or faint.

7. Monitor the News

Listen to the news and public announcements for heat advisories.

8. Use a Buddy System

When working in the heat, monitor the condition of your co-workers and have someone do the same for you. Heat-induced illness can cause a person to become confused or lose consciousness. If you are 65 years of age or older, have a friend or relative call to check on you twice a day during a heat wave. If you know someone in this age group, check on them at least twice a day.

9. Monitor Those at High Risk

Although any one at any time can suffer from heat-related illness, some people are at greater risk than others.

- Infants and children up to four years of age are sensitive to the effects of high temperatures and rely on others to regulate their environments and provide adequate liquids.
- People 65 years of age or older may not compensate for heat stress efficiently and are less likely to sense and respond to change in temperature.
- The homeless can become dehydrated rapidly due to a lack of ready access to water or shelter from the heat. If you observe someone who appears passed out, please contact 911 immediately.
- People who are overweight may be prone to heat sickness because of their tendency to retain more body heat.

- People who overexert during work or exercise may become dehydrated and susceptible to heat sickness.
- People who are physically ill, especially with heart disease or high blood pressure, or who take certain medications, such as for depression, insomnia, or poor circulation, may be affected by extreme heat.

Plan to check on family, friends, and neighbors –especially the elderly - who do not have air conditioning or who spend much of their time alone.

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.

10. Adjust to the Environment

Be aware that any sudden change in temperature, such as an early summer heat wave, will be stressful to your body. You will have a greater tolerance for heat if you limit your physical activity until you become accustomed to the heat. If you travel to a hotter climate, allow several days to become acclimated before attempting any vigorous exercise, and work up to it gradually.