



Congregational Care During Excessive heat



Take the heat seriously....

This special newsletter is prompted by the current extreme temperatures and the danger presented by the heat. In the midst of this large and intense heat wave, congregations can make a significant difference in identifying and protecting people who are most vulnerable to heat related emergencies. Excessive heat –

temperatures

ranging 10 or more degrees above the typical seasonal high - are dangerous. During an average summer more than 100 people die each week from heat events. In Chicago, during a single week in 1995, the lives of over 700 people, most of whom were over age 65, in were lost.

People at risk for heat emergencies include:

Those who have chronic respiratory or cardiovascular conditions

Are frail elderly living alone or young children

Those who work outside or in situations without air conditioning, or live in homes without air conditioning

People in densely populated urban areas (the heat is trapped by cement and buildings)

People who are overweight and obese

People on fixed incomes who might feel as though they cannot afford expensive air cooling

People who take certain medications, such as those treating depression, insomnia, or poor circulation

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For addition information and translation into the following languages - **Español** (Spanish) **Français** (French) (Vietnamese) **Kreyol** (Haitian Creole) **Deutsch** (German) (Chinese) – as well as the complete resource from which this summary was developed.

[translations](#)

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CDC has produced a downloadable guide to surviving the heat.

[Guide](#)

Athletes and others who exert themselves outside during the hottest portions of the day are all at risk when temperatures and heat indices reach and exceed 100 degrees

Pets, too are at risk in weather excessively warm weather and should be kept inside if possible or at least provided with shade and constant cool water

How can congregations help?

Here is a very limited list of ways...

- 📖. Include information in all publications reminding people to increase water consumption during hot weather and to curtail outdoor activities during the hottest times of the day.
- 📖. Make available awareness information on the signs of heat stress or stroke – muscle cramps, indigestion or nausea, skin that appears hot, dry, and inflamed, rapid & strong pulse, throbbing headache, dizziness, signs of confusion, hallucinations, and aggression.
- 📖. Make a list of people who fall into the risk groups outlined above and develop a call list, checking on each person - 2 times each day - and ascertaining that he or she has adequate cooling, provisions and assistance.
- 📖. Check on caregivers, too.
- 📖. Remember that people who know they are vulnerable to heat may wisely be reluctant to go outside, and may need to have groceries or medication brought to them. People with mobility limitations may also need extra assistance in obtaining necessities during a heat wave.
- 📖. Mobilize a care team to deliver lemonade or frozen fat and sugar free yogurt to people who may not be able to leave their homes.
- 📖. Collect and distribute fans for people who may not have adequate cooling mechanisms in their homes.
- 📖. Consider opening the church to members or groups who do not have a cool place to stay.
- 📖. Gather volunteers who can help throughout the community to be sure that people who are homeless, or living in marginal situations or simply without the funds needed to provide safe and cool environments in time of excessive heat are assisted.

Links

[National Health Ministries Website](#)

[Previous newsletters](#)

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How Does Excessive Heat Affect the Body?

One's body normally cools itself by increasing blood flow to the skin and perspiring. Heat-related illness and mortality occur when the body's temperature control system becomes overloaded. When this happens, perspiring may not be enough. High levels of humidity can make it even harder for the body to cool itself. When a person's body temperature rises rapidly, damage to the brain or other vital organs may occur.

Heat stress is a buildup of body heat generated either internally by muscle use or externally by the environment. Heat exhaustion and heat stroke result when the body is overwhelmed by heat. As the heat increases, body temperature and the heart rate rise painlessly. An increase in body temperature of two degrees Fahrenheit can affect mental functioning. A five degree Fahrenheit increase can result in serious illness or death.

During hot weather, heat illness may be an underlying cause of other types of injuries, such as heart attacks, falls and equipment accidents.

Heat stroke is the most serious health effect of excessive heat events. It is the failure of the body's temperature control system. When the body loses its ability to cool itself, core body temperature rises rapidly, and the resulting heat stroke can cause severe and permanent damage to vital organs. Body temperature may rise to 106°F or higher within 10 to 15 minutes. Heat stroke can cause death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not provided.

General Suggestions for Surviving Extreme Heat

1. **Visit air-conditioned buildings.** Air-conditioning is one of the best protective factors against heat-related illness and death. Even a few hours a day in air conditioning can greatly reduce the risk. Electric fans may provide comfort, but when temperatures are in the high 90s fans do not prevent heat-related illness.
2. **Take a cool shower or bath.**
3. **Drink lots of fluids.** Do not wait until you are thirsty to drink. If a health care provider has limited your fluid intake, make sure to ask how much to drink when it's hot. Avoid beverages containing caffeine, alcohol, or large amounts of sugar as they can cause dehydration.
4. **Ask your care provider if the medications you take could increase your susceptibility to heat-related illness.**
5. **Wear lightweight, light-colored, and loose-fitting clothing.**
6. **Replace Salt and Minerals (Sports drink or electrolyte balancers are good here.)**
7. **Wear Sunscreen.** Sunburn affects your body's ability to cool itself and causes a loss of body fluids.
8. **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.
9. **Pace Yourself.** If you are not accustomed to working or exercising in a hot environment, start slowly and pick up the pace gradually. 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.
10. **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.
11. **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.
12. **Adjust to the Environment and be aware that any**

sudden change in temperature, such as an early summer heat wave, will be stressful to your body.

13. **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.
14. Avoid spicy and hot foods and heavy meals—they add heat to your body.
15. Provide plenty of fresh water for your pets, and leave the water in a shady area.

Responding in a health stress or stroke situation - (Summarized from the CDC)

Remember and recognize the signs of heat stroke – nausea, hot, dry, and inflamed skin with no sweating, rapid & strong pulse, throbbing headache, dizziness, signs of confusion, hallucinations, and aggression, an extremely high body temperature, above 103°F, orally, and may be unconsciousness

If you see someone displaying any of signs, you may be dealing with a life-threatening emergency. Have someone call for immediate medical assistance while you begin cooling the person. Do the following:

1. CALL 911
2. Get the person to a shady area.
3. Cool the person rapidly using whatever methods you can. For example, immerse the person in a tub of cool water; place the person in a cool shower; spray the person with cool water from a garden hose; sponge the person with cool water; or if the humidity is low, wrap the person in a cool, wet sheet and fan him or her vigorously.
4. Monitor body temperature, and continue cooling efforts until the body temperature drops to 101-102°F.
5. If emergency medical personnel are delayed, call the hospital emergency room for further instructions.
6. Do not give the person fluids to drink.
7. Get medical assistance as soon as possible.

Sometimes a person's muscles will begin to twitch uncontrollably as a result of heat stroke. If this happens, keep the person from injuring him/herself, but do not place any object in the mouth and do not give fluids. If there is vomiting, make sure the airway remains open by turning the person on his or her side.

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. It is the body's response to an excessive loss of the water and salt contained in sweat. Those most prone to heat exhaustion are people who are frail elderly, people with high blood pressure, and people working or exercising in a hot environment. In the case of heat exhaustion 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. Seek medical attention if symptoms worsen or last longer than one hour.

Cooling measures that may be effective include the following:

- Cool, nonalcoholic beverages
- Rest
- Cool shower, bath, or sponge bath
- An air-conditioned environment
- Lightweight clothing

Heat cramps usually affect people who sweat a lot during strenuous activity. This sweating depletes the body's salt and moisture. The low salt level in the muscles may be the cause of heat cramps. Heat cramps may also be a symptom of heat exhaustion. Heat cramps are muscle pains or spasms—usually in the abdomen, arms, or legs—that may occur in association with strenuous activity. If you have heart problems or are on a low-sodium diet, get medical attention for heat cramps.

If medical attention is not necessary, take these steps:

- Stop all activity, and sit quietly in a cool place.
- Drink clear juice or a sports beverage.
- Do not return to strenuous activity for a few hours after the cramps subside, because further exertion may lead to heat exhaustion or heat stroke.
- Seek medical attention for heat cramps if they do not subside in 1 hour.

What to Do

Consult a doctor if the sunburn affects an infant younger than 1 year of age or if these symptoms are present:

- Fever
- Fluid-filled blisters
- Severe pain

Also, remember these tips when treating sunburn:

- Avoid repeated sun exposure.
- Apply cold compresses or immerse the sunburned area in cool water.
- Apply moisturizing lotion to affected areas. Do not use salve, butter, or ointment.
- Do not break blisters.

Heat Rash

Heat rash is a skin irritation caused by excessive sweating during hot, humid weather. It can occur at any age but is most common in young children and looks like a red

cluster of pimples or small blisters. It is more likely to occur on the neck and upper chest, in the groin, under the breasts, and in elbow creases. The best treatment for heat rash is to provide a cooler, less humid environment. Keep the affected area dry. Dusting powder may be used to increase comfort. Treating heat rash is simple and usually does not require medical assistance. Other heat-related problems can be much more severe.

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