



American Red Cross
of Greater Indianapolis

Extreme Heat Safety

Indiana summers are hot and humid. As a result, residents need to take precautions against heat-related illnesses that can cause serious injury and even death if unattended. Older adults, those with chronic health conditions and the very young are the most susceptible to the heat. **Signs of heat-related illnesses include nausea, dizziness, flushed or pale skin, heavy sweating and headaches.** Victims of heat-related illness should be moved to a cool place, given cool water to drink and ice packs or cool wet cloths should be applied to the skin. If a victim refuses water, vomits or loses consciousness, call 911 immediately

How to prevent heat-related illness

■ **Take it easy.** Slow down and avoid strenuous activity. If you must do strenuous activity, do it during the coolest part of the day—usually between 4 and 7 a.m.

■ **Join the “In Crowd.”**

Stay indoors as much as possible. If air conditioning isn’t available, stay on the lowest floor out of the sunshine. Try to go to public buildings with air conditioning each day for several hours. Remember, electric fans don’t cool the air, but they help sweat evaporate, which cools your body.

■ **Dress for the heat.**

When outdoors, wear lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing that covers as much skin as possible to prevent sunburn. Light colors reflect some of the sun’s energy. It’s also a good idea to wear hats or use an umbrella.

■ **Stay out of the sun.**

When outdoors, wear sunscreen with an SPF of at least 15.

■ **Drink to your health ...with water.**

Your body needs fluids to keep cool, and water is the safest liquid to drink during heat emergencies. Carry it with you and drink continuously even if you don’t feel thirsty. Avoid drinks with alcohol and caffeine. They can make you feel good briefly, but worsen the heat’s effects on your body. This especially is true about beer, which dehydrates the body.

■ **Hold the salt.**

Avoid using salt tablets unless directed to do so by a physician.

■ **Eat like a bird.**

Eat small meals and eat more often. Avoid high-protein foods, which increase metabolic heat.

■ **Be a good neighbor.**

During heat waves, check on older adults in your neighborhood and those who don’t have air conditioning.

■ **Use the buddy system.**

Look after each other when working in extreme heat and take frequent breaks.

■ **Leave no man, woman, child or pet behind.**

Never leave anyone, especially children, pets or those who require special care in a parked car in intense heat.

■ **Go public.**

Take advantage of your town or city's efforts to help local families stay cool during heat waves, such as sprinkler systems attached to fire hydrants.

Heat terms

Heat wave: A heat wave is a prolonged period of excessive heat and humidity. Listen to TV and radio for special alerts regarding increased threats to health and other dangers.

Heat index: The heat index indicates how hot it really feels when relative humidity is added to the actual air temperature. If you're exposed to full sunshine, the heat index can increase an additional 15 degrees.

Heat-related emergencies and how to treat them

Heat cramps

Heat cramps are muscular pains and spasms caused by heavy exertion. They usually involve the abdominal muscles or the legs. Although heat cramps are the least severe of the heat-related emergencies, they're an early signal that the body is having trouble.

Treatment: Get the person to a cooler place and resting in a comfortable position. Lightly stretch the affected muscle and replenish fluids. Give half a glass of cool water every 15 minutes. Don't give liquids with alcohol or caffeine in them, as they can make the condition worse.

Heat exhaustion

Heat exhaustion typically occurs when people exercise heavily or work in a hot, humid place where body fluids are lost through heavy sweating. Blood flow to the skin increases, causing blood flow to vital organs to decrease. This results in a form of mild shock. If not treated, the victim can suffer heat stroke.

Signs: Cool, moist, pale, flushed or red skin; heavy sweating; headache; nausea or vomiting; dizziness; exhaustion. Body temperature will be near normal.

Treatment: Get the person out of the heat and into a cooler place. Remove or loosen tight clothing and apply cool, wet cloths such as towels or sheets. If the person is conscious, give cool water to drink. Make sure the person drinks slowly. Give a half glass of cool water every 15 minutes. Don't give liquids that contain alcohol or caffeine. Let the victim rest in a comfortable position, and watch carefully for condition changes.

Heat stroke

Also known as sunstroke, heat stroke is life-threatening. The victim's temperature control system, which produces sweat to cool the body, stops working. The body temperature can rise so high that brain damage and death can result if the body isn't cooled quickly.

Signs: Hot, red skin; changes in consciousness; rapid, weak pulse; rapid, shallow breathing. Body temperature can be very high —sometimes as high as 105 degrees. If the person was sweating from heavy work or exercise, skin may be wet; otherwise it will feel dry.

Treatment: Heat stroke is life-threatening. Call 911. Move the person to a cooler place. Quickly cool the body. Immerse victim in a cool bath, or wrap wet sheets around the body and fan it. Watch for signs of breathing problems. Keep the person lying down, and continue to cool the body any way you can. If the victim refuses water or is vomiting or there are changes in the level of consciousness, don't give anything to eat or drink.