



# Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Beat the Heat: Health Department Offers Heat Survival Tips**

(Little Rock--) As the mercury continues to rise, Arkansas Department of Health officials are warning residents that heat can kill, but using precautionary measures can save lives.

On average, there are 400 heat-related deaths a year in the U.S. The 1995 heat wave in the Midwest contributed to 716 heat-related deaths in the U.S. that year alone. The heat wave of 1980 was an especially hard one for Arkansas—153 heat-related deaths. Last year, seven Arkansans died from the extreme hot weather.

Dr. David Bourne, Medical Leader, says, “While the elderly, people with health problems, and very young children are the most vulnerable, heat can affect anyone—even strong, healthy athletes. Our bodies are cooled primarily by losing heat through skin and evaporation of perspiration. Problems occur when we are unable to shed excess heat from too much sun or high humidity levels. When our heat gain exceeds the amount we can get rid of, our temperature begins to rise, and heat-related illness may develop.”

The following heat disorders are progressive and should be attended to immediately.

- Heat cramps. These are the result of prolonged muscular pain caused by severe salt depletion due to heavy sweating. Treatment includes salt replacement, cooling down and gentle massage.
- Heat exhaustion. This is the most common illness caused by heat and often occurs while the person is working outside or attending outside events in extremely hot, humid weather. With heat exhaustion, there is interference in the circulation of blood to vital organs such as the brain, heart, and lungs. The victim may complain of weakness and feel faint. Other symptoms include dizziness, nausea, headache and confusion. The person should be moved to a cooler place, and wet cloths applied for cooling down. Fluid and salt should be replaced. Depending on the severity of the illness, hospitalization and intravenous fluid replacement may be necessary. This condition usually comes just before heat stroke.

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- Heat stroke (also called sunstroke). This is a life-threatening condition in which the victim's temperature-control system stops working. Sweating stops completely, and the body's temperature can rise so high that the nervous system, the brain and other organs can be damaged permanently. Death may occur if the body is not cooled quickly. The symptoms of heat stroke include sudden high fever, dry skin, delirium, convulsions and seizures. Heat stroke is a medical emergency—call 911 and cool the person as fast as you can. Ice, a cold bath and wet sheets are recommended until medical help arrives.

Those who work, exercise, or participate in strenuous activity, such as soccer or football practice, for an hour or more during intense heat, may lose or sweat up to two quarts of water. If you must pursue intense activity during hot weather, follow these safety tips.

- Drink plenty of water; fluid replacement is crucial to avoid heat risks. Drink more water than usual before exercising or working in the heat. If you are elderly or taking medication, ask your doctor about fluid intake recommendations.
- Schedule your strenuous activity during the coolest time of the day.
- Monitor how you feel. If you have difficulty maintaining your regular pace, slow down.

Elderly people should avoid staying shut-up indoors during heat waves without using air conditioning. More than half of the 700 heat-related deaths in the 1995 Chicago heat wave could have been prevented with an air conditioner in the home, according to a published study. Experts say fans are apparently not effective against heat illness during intense heat waves. If you cannot afford an air conditioner for your home, spend more time in other air-conditioned environments. Access to air conditioning for even a few hours a day is protective. If you know someone who may be at risk for heat-related problems, check on them frequently.

By following these simple guidelines, Arkansans can beat the heat and stay healthy and safe during the hot, summer months.

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