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Keep your cool when temperatures soar

Ithaca, Stanton, St. Johns- When Mother Nature turns up the heat this summer, be sure to enjoy the higher temperatures with caution, moderation and lots and lots of hydration.

While many people actually look forward to summer's hot, steamy weather, it's important to realize that high temperatures, especially when combined with high levels of humidity, can be dangerous. When temperatures soar to a sizzling 80 degrees Fahrenheit or more, the body can easily become overheated, resulting in severe heat illness and even death.

People at highest risk for heat-related illness are those who are homeless, the elderly, the very young, pregnant women, and people with mental illness, high blood pressure, and chronic diseases. But even young, healthy people can get sick from the heat if they participate in strenuous physical activities or work outside during hot weather.

Dehydration is the first stage of heat-related illness and occurs when body fluids are lost by sweating, and not replaced. Symptoms include dry mouth, thirst, headache, dizziness, cramps, excessive fatigue and irritability. If dehydration occurs, move to a shaded or air-conditioned area, replace fluids by drinking water, and consult a physician if symptoms persist.

The next stage of heat-related illness is heat exhaustion. Heat exhaustion typically occurs when people exercise or work in warm, humid conditions where excessive sweating leads to fluid loss. Symptoms can include heavy sweating; pale or flushed complexion; muscle cramps; elevated body temperature; headache; clammy, pale skin; nausea; dizziness; confusion; weakness and fatigue. To treat heat exhaustion, seek shade in a cool place, rehydrate, and apply a cool, wet towel or compress. Heat exhaustion can develop into heat stroke, so if symptoms persist or worsen, seek emergency medical treatment.

Heat stroke, the most severe stage of heat-related illness, occurs when the body becomes unable to control its temperature. The body's temperature rises rapidly (to 105 degrees Fahrenheit or higher within 10 to 15 minutes), the sweating mechanism fails, and the body is unable to cool down. Symptoms can include vomiting; headache; chills; confusion; dizziness; red, hot, dry skin; and a rapid, weak pulse. If heat stroke is suspected, call 911 immediately and move the person to a cool, shaded, or air-conditioned area. If possible, put them in a tub of cool water or shower them with a garden hose.

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2- Stay cool when things heat up

Take these steps to stay cool during hot weather:

- Use air conditioning or stay cool at libraries, stores or cooling centers
- Drink plenty of water
- Minimize direct exposure to the sun
- Limit time outdoors, and take frequent breaks if you must be outside
- Avoid alcohol and drinks with large amounts of caffeine or sugar
- Wear loose, lightweight, light-colored clothing
- Take a cool shower, bath, or swim to cool down
- Check on your friends and neighbors, especially those who are older or have health issues
- Use fans as needed, but remember that once the temperature reaches the high 90s, fans will not prevent heat illness
- Never leave children, the elderly, or pets in a vehicle in extreme heat, even with the windows rolled down

Mid-Michigan District Health Department serves the residents of Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm Counties.

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