

Ask CDC

It's Hot Out There

[Announcer] This podcast is presented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. CDC – safer, healthier people.

Welcome to *Ask CDC*, the weekly podcast that answers *your* questions. I'm your host, Susan Laird.

Our question this week is from a young mother who is worried about her family's health and safety when they're outside in the hot summer sun.

Being in the great outdoors is a way of life for millions of Americans during the hot, hazy days of summer, but heat-related illnesses claim nearly 700 lives each year.

People suffer heat-related illness when their body is unable to compensate and properly cool. The body normally cools by sweating, but under some conditions, sweating just isn't enough. In these cases, a person's body temperature rises rapidly. Very high body temperatures can damage the brain or other vital organs.

The best defense against heat-related illness is prevention. Here are some prevention tips:

- Drink more fluids, regardless of your activity level. Don't wait until you're thirsty to drink. If your doctor generally limits the amount of fluid you drink or has you on water pills, ask him how much you should drink when the weather is hot.
- Don't drink liquids that contain alcohol or large amounts of sugar; these actually cause you to *lose* body fluid. Avoid very cold drinks; they can cause stomach cramps.
- Stay indoors and, if at all possible, in an air-conditioned place. If your home doesn't have air conditioning, go to the 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 your local health department to see if there are any heat-relief shelters in your area.
- Taking a cool shower or bath is also a good way to cool off, as well as wearing lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing. Electric fans may provide comfort, but when the temperature is in the high 90s, fans will not prevent heat-related illness.
- *Never* leave pets or people – young or old – in a closed, parked vehicle.
- Although anyone at any time can suffer heat-related illness, some people are at greater risk than others. Check regularly on:
 - Infants and young children,
 - People aged 65 or older,
 - People with chronic illnesses, such as heart disease and high blood pressure, and
 - People with severe depression or other mental health problems.
- Visit adults at risk at least twice a day and watch them closely for signs of heat exhaustion or heat stroke. Infants and young children, of course, need much more frequent watching.

If you must be out in the heat for chores or recreation:

- Limit your outdoor activity to morning and evening hours, if possible.
- Cut down on exercise. If you must exercise, drink two to four glasses of cool, non-alcoholic fluids every hour. A sports beverage can replace the salt and minerals you lose in sweat. If you're on a low-salt diet, talk to your doctor before drinking a sports beverage.
- Try to rest often in shady areas.
- Protect yourself from the sun by wearing a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses and putting on sunscreen with SPF 15 or higher that contains both UVA *and* UVB protection.

At work, be aware of the dangers of heat stress. If you're an employer, have safety precautions for workers, such as rest breaks in a cool area, plenty of water at the work site, and training and education to raise workers' awareness of heat-stress symptoms and the importance of following precautions. If you're a worker, take breaks, drink water frequently, and monitor your physical condition and the physical condition of your co-workers.

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov and click on "Extreme Heat" in the A to Z index or call 1-800-CDC-INFO.

Thanks for listening. To submit *your* question to *Ask CDC*, email us at askcdc@cdc.gov.

[Announcer] For the most accurate health information, visit www.cdc.gov or call 1-800-CDC-INFO, 24/7.