

## Providing Assistance During Heat Waves Information for Local Health Departments

This fact sheet contains updated information intended to help local health departments (LHDs) answer heat wave related questions from the general public, as well as new information about how to handle calls from workers regarding excessive heat in the workplace. We suggest that you inform the callers about the hazards of heat, help them to learn warning signs of heat-related illness, and suggest some of the solutions outlined in this fact sheet.

### Health Effects of Heat Illness

Heat illnesses include Heat stroke, Heat exhaustion, Heat cramps, and Heat rash. Adverse health effects occur primarily when air temperatures exceed 90°F and relative humidity is 60% or higher. Heat affects everyone differently, and varies with personal risk factors and health status. The elderly, infants, persons with impaired mobility, psychological illnesses or alcoholism, chronic diseases, and/or those taking diuretics, antipsychotic drugs, and anticholinergic (muscle relaxants) are most at risk.

**>90°F + RH >60% = Adverse Health Effects from Heat**

### HEAT STROKE IS A MEDICAL EMERGENCY— Seek Medical Attention Immediately!

Symptoms include:

- ◆ Body temp. greater or equal to 105° F
- ◆ Skin hot, dry, red spotted
- ◆ Mental confusion
- ◆ Loss of consciousness
- ◆ Convulsions



### HEAT EXHAUSTION is due to the body losing too much fluid.

Symptoms include:

- ◆ Dizziness
- ◆ Weakness
- ◆ Fatigue
- ◆ Head ache
- ◆ Nausea

**Do Not Give Salt Tablets To Someone Who Already Has Symptoms.** It can be potentially dangerous

## General Public

It is important to educate the public about signs and symptoms of heat illness, and encourage them to take a proactive role during heat waves, like visiting a cooling center, checking on neighbors, the elderly, and disabled individuals. They should be encouraged to call 911 or visit a hospital emergency department if the excessive heat is making them ill.



### ◆ Cooling Center Locations:

Many municipalities open cooling centers during heat waves to give those without air-conditioning some relief from the heat. For a list of cooling centers where people can go to get relief from the heat wave, the public can call Info Line (211) or visit the Info Line website at <http://www.infoline.org/>

### ◆ General Recommendations

As a Local Health Director, some general recommendations you can make to prevent heat related illness include:

- ◆ Know the signs and symptoms of heat stroke and heat stress – *seek medical attention immediately.*
- ◆ Increase fluid intake (water, electrolyte-restoring beverages)
- ◆ Avoid strenuous activities
- ◆ Take frequent rest breaks
- ◆ Wear light, relaxed fitting clothing
- ◆ Avoid consuming alcohol
- ◆ Try to spend at least a few hours of the day in a cool environment. Go to a cooling center in your area (see above), or a public place that is likely to have air conditioning, such as shopping malls, movie theatres, many restaurants, libraries, etc.



## Schools

While there are no specific recommendations for schools, some school officials have chosen to shorten the school day to limit exposure to extreme heat. If they ask for your advise, you may wish to support their decision, and offer the recommendations contained in this memo, but at this time, we are not advising that the decision to close schools based upon extreme heat be the responsibility of the LHD, unless you choose to do so. Remember that before closing a school (or any building) for any reason, you need to know what criteria you will be using to re-open the building. No such criterion exists for extreme heat events, so it is usually a practical decision made by the school district.



## Occupational Settings

There are no state statutes or public health code sections regarding working during excessive heat, and no specific requirements for LHDs or DPH to conduct any official follow-up for worker complaints related to heat. However, while there is no regulatory role for LHDs, heat-related situations do represent a public health hazard, so a response of some type is appropriate. Here are some general recommendations that you may give to employers or workers in occupational settings:



- ◆ Have chilled water available for workers
  - ◆ Provide frequent rest breaks
  - ◆ Allow workers to wear loose fitting clothing, if safety permits
  - ◆ Think about moving heat-producing jobs to earlier in the day, when it is cooler
  - ◆ Encourage employees to report to their supervisor if they are feeling ill or if they notice co-workers having difficulty working in the heat
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- ◆ If you call an employer at the request of employees, one strategy is to offer the general recommendations (above), adding that employees who feel unwell should be allowed to seek medical attention. Additionally, mentioning that you will be documenting the fact that you made this recommendation in your files may result in employers taking these recommendations more seriously.
  - ◆ OSHA does provide some technical guidance to their compliance officers about evaluating heat stress risks in workplaces. However, this is dependent upon the nature of the work being performed and temperature in the workplace (usually over 90° F). In general, OSHA will not respond to heat-related complaints in workplaces with inspections or citations unless the case is extreme, such as an employer refusing to allow workers any water or breaks. As such, we do not recommend that LHDs refer workplace heat complaints to OSHA. If you feel that a particular workplace situation warrants action beyond the routine advice listed above, **we ask that LHDs contact** the DPH Occupational Health Unit at (860) 509-7740.

## Resources

New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene has an informative website for the general public about heat illness signs, symptoms, and prevention, and an easy to understand description of the heat index. <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/cd/cdheat.shtml>

CT Department of Public Health Occupational Health Newsletter  
[http://www.ct.gov/dph/lib/dph/environmental\\_health/eoha/pdf/july\\_04.pdf](http://www.ct.gov/dph/lib/dph/environmental_health/eoha/pdf/july_04.pdf)  
(pages 5-6)



The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has a number of fact sheets relating to planning for excessive heat and reducing risk. Some of the fact sheets are available in English, Spanish, Arabic, Armenian, simplified Chinese, traditional Chinese, French, Haitian Creole, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Tagalog, Thai, and Vietnamese. Go to:  
<http://www.epa.gov/aging/resources/factsheets/itdhpfehe/index.htm>

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has a web page with a number of extreme heat fact sheets, tips, and publications in several languages. There is information targeted for general populations, the elderly, and workers. Go to: <http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/index.asp>