



# SAFETY BULLETIN

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## Excessive Heat Could Cause A Disaster For You

Heat waves and droughts take more lives than almost any other natural disaster in North American history. This fact should serve as a reminder of the importance of protecting yourself from the effects of excess heat.

Heat stress occurs when the body has to work too hard to cool off. The body's core temperature gets too high for the body to cool off quickly enough. Heat stress symptoms include the following:

- Heat cramps often occur in the legs and abdomen when a person is sweating heavily and replacing water but not salt. The skin is hot and moist. Pulse is normal.
- Heat exhaustion occurs when the body's heat control system is overtaxed. The core body temperature is increasing, which may lead to heat stroke. Symptoms of heat exhaustion include heavy sweating, intense thirst, cool and moist skin, weak and fast pulse and feelings of fatigue, weakness or dizziness.
- Heat stroke is a serious emergency which requires immediate medical attention. It occurs when the body is rapidly using up its supplies of water and salt. Sweating stops and the body, including the brain, begins to overheat rapidly. Body temperature climbs to fatal levels. Symptoms include hot, dry, flushed skin, rapid pulse, difficulty breathing, headache, confusion and strange behavior, weakness and nausea. Heat stroke can rapidly progress to seizure and convulsions, unconsciousness and loss of pulse.

### The following are some tips for avoiding heat stress this summer:

- Follow work and rest routines which keep you from becoming exhausted in the heat. Alternate heavy work with lighter work, or move from a hot location to a cooler one periodically. Take advantage of scheduled breaks to rest and cool off.
- Drink water frequently. One of the main causes of heat stress is dehydration, so keep up your intake of water or fluid replacement drinks. Don't wait until you are thirsty to drink. Avoid alcohol and caffeine beverages, which actually deplete the body of fluids.
- Eat regular, light meals. Save the hot dinner until after work, and have something cool such as salad for lunch. If you are sweating a lot, lightly salt your foods to replace salt. However, if you are on a salt-restricted diet, seek medical advice about this. Salt tablets are not recommended.
- Take care when moving from a cool area to a hot one, such as leaving an air-conditioned workplace and stepping out into the late afternoon heat. Take time to get accustomed to the temperature, and slow down. Getting into a hot car can also be a shock to the system, so use ventilation to cool it down.
- Dress in loose, comfortable clothing made of light fabrics and in light colors. Layer your clothing so you can add and take off items of clothing as the temperature changes.
- People in poor health, overweight, tired, hung over, taking certain medications, older, or previous victims of heat stress, are more susceptible to heat illness.

**The treatment of heat stress depends on how serious it is:**

- In the case of heat cramps move into the shade and loosen clothing. Drink lightly salted fluids. Seek medical help if the cramps persist. Keep the victim sitting or lying down.
- For heat exhaustion, get the victim to a cooler shaded area. Loosen clothing, and begin cooling the victim quickly - by fanning him and pouring cool water on him if necessary. Have the victim drink water, salted if available.
- Heat stroke is a serious, life threatening condition and the person needs immediate medical help. Call an ambulance immediately, and begin cooling the victim as quickly as possible. Spray or sponge him with cool water or immerse him. Do not give liquids to an unconscious person.
- Heat stroke is a life-threatening illness. Take steps to prevent heat illness, and treat all heat disorders seriously.