

Hot Tips for Heat Stress

Heat stress is a serious, potentially fatal condition. Heat stress occurs when high temperatures and humidity become trapped in your child's body. Children are more at risk for heat-related illnesses because they sweat less than adults. Sweating is one of the body's main ways to get rid of heat. Children also may not know when to rest, especially when they are having fun or playing sports. This makes it easy for them to become over-heated. Children who have pre-existing health conditions, such as cystic fibrosis or heart conditions, are more at risk of developing heat stress.

Heat stress is a progressive condition from heat cramps to heat exhaustion to heat stroke—so early recognition and intervention are crucial.

PREVENTION IS THE BEST TREATMENT

The following are tips for preventing heat stress during periods of intense heat and humidity:

- Give your child plenty of clear, tepid fluids; encourage drinking every 20 minutes—do not rely solely on the child's thirst to determine the need to drink.
- Avoid being outside between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
- Insist that your child rest and cool down frequently.
- Watch for the early signs of heat stress and start cooling your child right away.
- Use hats or umbrellas for shade.
- Do not give your child salt tablets because they slow down the absorption of water.
- Allow your child to become conditioned to heat by gradually extending the length of time he is out in the heat.
- Call the doctor at any signs of heat exhaustion or if muscle cramps are not relieved with treatment.
- Call 911 right away if your child shows any signs of heat stroke.

TYPES OF HEAT STRESS

- **Heat Cramps** are the most common and least serious type of heat stress. They are spasms in the muscle that result from strenuous exercise in hot, humid conditions. Cramping usually occurs in the arms, legs or abdomen. Heat cramps also can be caused by overworking muscles or not warming-up before exercise. Symptoms can include painful cramps, flushed face, nausea, weakness and a fever of 98.6°F to 101°F.
- **Heat Exhaustion** results from too much exposure to heat and/or physical activity. Symptoms can include a fever greater than 102°F; flu-like symptoms of nausea, vomiting and diarrhea; strong thirst; heavy sweating; excessive worry; cool, pale and clammy skin.
- **Heat Stroke** can be a life-threatening emergency. The trapped heat can cause injury to kidneys, liver, heart and brain. Symptoms can include a fever greater than 106°F, confusion, agitation, no sweating, hysterical behavior and coma.

TREATMENT OF HEAT CRAMPS

- Slowly stretch the cramping muscle and follow by gentle massage if the cramping persists. Overly hard or deep massage can cause pain and damage the muscle.
- Give your child a watered-down sports drink.
- Move your child to an air conditioned or fanned area.
- Undress your child or wet down clothing.
- Make sure your child rests for at least two days after an episode of multiple cramps.

TREATMENT OF HEAT EXHAUSTION

- Give your child a cooling drink, such as a watered-down sports drink or water.
- Move your child to an air-conditioned or fanned area.
- Undress your child and wet down the skin.
- Call your child’s doctor if he does not seem to be recovering within a few minutes.
- Even if your child seems recovered, do not let him return to outdoor play.
- Keep your child indoors in a cool place for several days.

TREATMENT OF HEAT STROKE

- Call 911.
- Give your child a cooling drink if conscious.
- Undress your child and wet down the skin (use ice if available).

SUNBURN

- Another heat-related condition is sunburn. Sunburn also makes it harder for the body to release heat and can lead to other heat-related illnesses. Symptoms of sunburn include redness, pain and in severe cases, swelling of skin, blisters, fever and headaches.

TREATMENT OF SUNBURN

- Use sunscreen made for children with sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15. Apply all over your child’s body, then re-apply according to the sunscreen’s directions. If your child swims, use waterproof sunscreen.
- Shield sensitive shoulders and chest with a T-shirt.
- Wear a hat with a wide brim to protect and shade the face. Glare from water and other reflective surfaces can compound the risk of burn.
- Children’s sunglasses—with 100 percent ultraviolet (UV) protection—are a good idea.
- Do not let your child stay in the sun too long, especially between noon and 3 p.m.
- Infants should be protected from the sun primarily with covering rather than sunscreens.