



California
Department of
Health Services

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TO: ALL LONG TERM CARE HEALTH FACILITIES

SUBJECT: HOT WEATHER ADVISORY

The summer season with its high temperatures is upon us once again. Long-term health care facilities are reminded that the elderly and other health compromised individuals are more susceptible to extremes in temperature and dehydration.

The following is a listing of the types of medical emergencies that can occur with these individuals during summer weather conditions:

VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

- Elderly >65 years

The aging process creates poor circulation, inefficient sweat glands and changes in the skin, all of which affect the body's ability to adapt to heat.

Because they do not feel the heat, the elderly may overdress.

Medications and low salt diets can increase the adverse effects of heat.

- Young children <4 year

- Overweight people

- People with chronic illnesses, fever, or medical conditions making them more susceptible to heat problems

- Anyone using drugs or alcohol in the heat

- People who overexert during work or activities in the heat

HEAT EXHAUSTION

Exhaustion is the body's response to excessive loss of water and salt under heat stress conditions. Populations most vulnerable to heat exhaustion are the elderly or very young, and people working/exercising in the heat. If left untreated, heat exhaustion will lead to heat stroke.

Symptoms of heat exhaustion:

- Heavy sweating
- Pale skin, cool and moist
- Pulse rapid and weak
- Respirations fast and shallow
- Muscle cramping
- Fatigue
- Weakness and dizziness
- Nausea or vomiting
- Fainting

Treatment:

- Move victim to cool, air-conditioned environment
- Cool, non-alcoholic beverages if no nausea/vomiting
- Cooling measures including cool bath/shower, light-weight clothing
- Rest
- Monitor body temperature
- Seek immediate medical attention
- Monitor Intake and Output

HEAT STROKE

Heat stroke occurs with the body's temperature rises rapidly and the sweating mechanism fails. Within minutes, the body temperature can reach 106 or higher. This high temperature can cause death or permanent disability.

Symptoms of heat stroke:

- Red, hot skin, no sweating
- Rapid, strong pulse
- Severe throbbing headache
- Extremely high body temperature, above 103°F orally
- Dizziness and nausea
- Confusion or unconsciousness
- Uncontrolled twitching

Treatment:

- Move victim to cool, shady area

- Cooling measures with cool water bath or shower until temperature drops to 101° to 102°F orally
- Monitor body temperature
- Seek immediate medical attention
- Monitor Intake and Output
- Protect the victim from harm

OTHER HEAT RELATED CONDITIONS

Heat cramps, sunburn and heat rash can be heat related conditions but are not life threatening. However, if the conditions are ignored, the symptoms can progress leading to more serious problems. Getting out of the sun, cooling measures, rest and hydration are key treatment points.

HEALTHCARE PROVIDER'S ROLE

The healthcare provider's role is vital.

- Assess patient environment or activities for heat risks and make environmental or activity changes
- Educate the patients on heat emergency prevention and treatment
 - ✓ Drink plenty of fluids (especially fruit juices and sports drinks). Remember that thirst is not an indicator of hydration!
 - ✓ During heavy exercise, drink 16-32 ounces of cool fluids per hour.
 - ✓ Wear light clothing and a hat. Use sunscreen.
 - ✓ Get into air-conditioned areas, even for short periods a day. A cool shower or bath is an effective way to cool off.
 - ✓ Use common sense! Don't leave people or animals in locked cars or non-ventilated spaces. This can lead to severe heat related injury!
 - ✓ Pace yourself in physical activities and schedule outdoor activities either before noon or in the evening to avoid the highest heat.
- Create Bulletin Boards in public areas or waiting rooms with prevention education and information
- Stay aware yourself of heat extremes and take steps to prevent your own heat emergency!

Sincerely,

Kathleen Billingsley, R.N.
Deputy Director