

# EXTREME HEAT

## WHAT IT IS

Extreme heat – especially coupled with high humidity – can be deadly, slowing evaporation and thus requiring the body to work harder to moderate its core temperature. Overexposure to heat and/or overexertion (too much exercise or effort) can trigger a heat-related illness: heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and eventually heat stroke. Heat-related illness is a particularly high risk for children, older adults, and those who are infirm or overweight.

## KEY TERMS

- ▶ A **Heat Wave** is a prolonged period of excessive heat, often combined with high humidity.
- ▶ The **Heat Index** indicates how hot it feels, with relative humidity and sun exposure added to the absolute air temperature. Exposure to full sunshine can increase the heat index by 15 degrees.
- ▶ **Heat Cramps** are muscular pains and spasms due to heavy exertion.
- ▶ **Heat Exhaustion** typically occurs when people exercise heavily or work in a hot, humid place, and body fluids are lost through heavy sweating. Heat exhaustion must be treated with fluids and cooling of the skin, or it will turn into heat stroke.
- ▶ **Heat Stroke** (or “sun stroke”) is a life-threatening condition in which the victim’s temperature-control system, which produces sweat to cool the body, stops working. Heat stroke victims will be completely incoherent or unconscious, and they require immediate medical attention.

## WHAT TO DO

### Before (Preparedness/ Mitigation)

- ❑ Sign up for Fairfax Alerts and have a battery or crank powered NOAA weather radio available.
- ❑ If you have an air conditioner, have it serviced regularly.
- ❑ Drink plenty of fluids. Know your body and know what is normal.
- ❑ Dress in loose-fitting clothes that cover as much skin as possible. Lightweight, light-colored clothing reflects heat and sunlight and helps maintain normal body temperatures.
- ❑ Reschedule outdoor activities, if possible.
- ❑ Never leave children or pets alone in closed vehicles.
- ❑ Learn First Aid.
- ❑ Refer to “Power Outage/ Blackout” and “Medical Emergency,” below.

### During (Response)

- ❑ Stay indoors as much as possible and limit exposure to heat and sun.
- ❑ Drink plenty of water or electrolyte sports drinks.
- ❑ Avoid strenuous work during the warmest part of the day.
- ❑ Use a buddy system when working in extreme heat, have a phone handy, and take frequent breaks.

- ❑ If you must exercise, consider indoor activities. If you must exercise outside, do so during cooler parts of the day, drink extra fluids, use a buddy system, have a phone handy, and reduce your level of effort.
- ❑ If you feel woozy, overheated, or unwell, take action immediately!
  - Stop any strenuous activity.
  - Get somewhere cool.
  - Drink something if you can.
  - Cool your skin by taking a cold bath or holding anything cold against your body.
  - Call someone for help, or call 911 – do this before your condition compromises your critical thinking skills!
- ❑ Check on older neighbors and any neighbors without air conditioning.

### After (Recovery)

- ❑ Consult a medical professional if a heat-related condition does not improve.
- ❑ Continue to hydrate.