

HOT WEATHER CAN BE DANGEROUS TO YOUR HEALTH AND LIFE!

With the onset of summer weather, all Illinoisans must take on additional responsibilities to prevent heat related illness that can be life threatening. Health problems and isolation are factors that make older people particularly susceptible to heat stress. It is also important for family members, friends and neighbors to check on those older persons who may be unable or unwilling to seek assistance.

WHAT IS A HEAT WAVE?

- * Generally, a heat wave is three straight days of 90 degree temperatures or more with high humidity.
- * Heat waves are the second leading cause of death among weather-related events.

WHAT IS A HEAT INDEX?

- * High temperatures and high relative humidity determine the heat index.
- * In summer, humidity makes it feel hotter. If the temperature is 90 degrees and the relative humidity is 80 percent, it will feel like it is 113 degrees. Your body will react to the 113 degree temperature.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO BEAT THE HEAT?

Some common sense tips for handling the heat include the following:

- * Drink lots of water and natural juices. (Please avoid alcoholic beverages, coffees and colas.);
- * avoid going out into blazing heat, if possible;
- * avoid or minimize physical exertion;
- * keep shades drawn and blinds closed, but windows slightly open;
- * do not place tin foil over your windows, as the room temperature will rise;
- * keep electric lights off or turned down;

- * take frequent cool baths or showers; use cool towels;
- * remain in air conditioning either at home or at a cooling center.; (Only 1 or 2 hours in air conditioning can prevent a person from becoming ill.);
- * wear loose cotton clothing;
- * do not eat heavy meals (eat small meals and eat more often);
- * avoid using cooking ovens;
- * avoid using salt tablets unless directed to do so by a physician;
- * if you are taking medications, check with your pharmacist or your doctor on any side effects due to the heat;
- * check on family members, friends and neighbors; and
- * above all, take the heat seriously, and do not ignore danger signs like nausea, dizziness and fatigue. If you or anyone you know needs medical attention, call 911 or the local Police Department immediately.

As you may or may not be aware, older persons have a reduced capacity to perspire and are therefore more vulnerable to heat. Persons who do not perspire will not be helped by fans. They must have air conditioning to recover from the accumulating effect of the heat. A few hours a day in air conditioning is extremely important to protect your health and life.

The Illinois Department on Aging and local Area Agencies on Aging will be working hand-in-hand to assist older persons at risk. During heat emergencies, communities will be involved in door-to-door outreach; senior centers, adult day care sites and other familiar public buildings in your community will be used as cooling centers; and information and assistance will be available on an ongoing basis through the network of local agencies serving older persons, where you live.

For further information about local programs and services available to assist older persons, please call the Department on Aging's Senior HelpLine:

800-252-8966