



County of Sacramento

May 15, 2008

Media Contact: Kerry Shearer (916) 875-5881

For Immediate Release

The Heat is On: How to Prevent Heat-related Illness

(Sacramento) -- The days are long and sunny. The evenings are generally cool. In Sacramento, daytime temperatures even in May can climb into the high nineties and low 100s. It is great to be outdoors working in the garden, biking, or just relaxing with a book. However, it is important to be aware of the signs of too much heat.

Sacramento is known for its hot summers. Usually, delta breezes cool us off in the evenings. However, in 2006, there were several days in a row where daily temperatures did not drop below 70 degrees F. As a result, 14 people died because their bodies could not regulate their temperature. Many were elderly or had chronic diseases that put them at risk.

What are the warning signs and who is at risk for heat illness?

Heat illness occurs whenever the body cannot compensate for excessive heat by cooling itself naturally by sweating. Sweat evaporation cools the skin allowing the body to release heat quickly. When the humidity is high, sweat ceases to evaporate and the body's natural cooling system slows down, eventually shutting down completely. Fortunately, in Sacramento we rarely have high humidity days. A heat wave in Sacramento consists of very high temperatures in the daytime, and not enough cooling in the evening and night.

Other conditions that increase risk of heat illness include age (the elderly and young children), obesity, fever, dehydration, heart disease, mental illness, poor circulation, sunburn, prescription drug use, and alcohol use. Newcomers not acclimated to hot environments are more susceptible.

Sacramento County Health Officer Glennah Trochet M.D. says: "When the body goes too long without being able to regulate its temperature, heat stroke can occur. Body temperature may rise to 106 degrees F or higher within 10 to 15 minutes. Heat stroke can cause death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not provided. Warning signs of heat stroke vary but may include the following: an extremely high body temperature (above 103 degrees F); red, hot, and dry skin (no sweating); rapid, strong pulse; throbbing headache; dizziness; nausea; confusion; and unconsciousness."

Trochet says that a milder form of heat illness, heat exhaustion, can develop after several days of exposure to high temperatures, no opportunity to cool down, and reduced or unbalanced intake of fluids. The warning signs of heat exhaustion include: heavy sweating, paleness, muscle cramps, tiredness, weakness, dizziness, headache, nausea or vomiting, and fainting. The skin may be cool and moist. The pulse rate will be fast and weak, and breathing will be fast and shallow. If heat exhaustion is untreated, it

may progress to heat stroke. The elderly, people with high blood pressure, and people working or exercising in a hot environment are most susceptible to heat exhaustion.

Get ready now!

During a heat wave, allowing our bodies to cool down, even if it is for a few hours a day, provides protection from heat illness. Ways to protect yourself include:

- Maintaining access to air conditioning in our homes, going to a cool or air-conditioned place for a few hours a day. Extreme heat may be more dangerous during power outages or when people avoid using air-conditioners in order to prevent high utility bills.
- Staying well-hydrated by drinking plenty of fluids
- Doing preventive maintenance on a home's air conditioner at the beginning of the heat season to make sure it's in good running order before severe heat hits.
- Making a plan to get access to a cool spot if your home doesn't have air conditioning and gets too hot.
- Arranging for family and friends to check in on vulnerable persons at least twice a day.
- During extended hot spells, making plans to stay with someone who has a cooler house.

Remember that even a few hours in a cool environment, like a mall, community center, restaurant or cooler house will help a person's body recover from excessive heat.

Another important thing to remember about the heat is that cars can get extremely hot in the sun. Don't ever leave children or pets in a parked car alone.

Most adults are aware of the need to stay hydrated when exercising in the heat. Children and older adults may need to be reminded to take liquids. Water is excellent as a thirst quencher and for hydration. Many people believe that alcoholic drinks are also refreshing; however, alcohol can act as a diuretic and adds to dehydration! It is best to avoid using alcohol for hydration.

For more information, call the Sacramento County Department of Health and Human Services Public Health Division at (916) 875-5881 or online at <http://www.scph.com/>

For information about other Sacramento County programs and services, please contact the Countywide Services Agency at (916) 874-4667 or visit www.csa.saccounty.net

###