



**American
Red Cross**

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News Release **NEWS RELEASE**

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AMERICAN RED CROSS URGES CAUTION IN SUMMER HEAT *Forecast Hot Weather Means People Should Prepare*

PROVIDENCE, RI, June 18, 2012 – The first very hot weather of the summer is forecast to affect Rhode Island later this week. The American Red Cross urges the public to take precautions against the heat.

“High temperatures bring special health risks,” said American Red Cross spokesperson Paul Shipman. “Being knowledgeable about the effects of heat is the best way to be prepared.” Shipman said that Red Cross First Aid training teaches individuals how to recognize and treat heat-related illnesses and other emergencies “but some basic precautions everyone can take right now will help avoid discomfort, illness and even death.”

The National Weather Service reports that excessive heat is the number one weather-related killer, causing more fatalities per year than floods, lightning, tornadoes and hurricanes combined. Heat waves can be especially dangerous as high temperatures are sustained for a long period of time. A heat wave occurs when there are three consecutive days or more with high temperatures rising above 90 degrees. “While the current forecast is not predicting a heat wave, it’s our first heat of the season and a great time to make sure that you’re ready for summer and know how to stay safe,” Shipman said.

Everyone is at risk when temperatures rise above 90 degrees, but those over 50 years of age are most susceptible to heat and heat-related illnesses, accounting for 78% of heat related fatalities in 2006. Signs of heat-related illnesses include nausea, dizziness, flushed or pale skin, heavy sweating and headaches. Victims of heat-related illness should be moved to a cool place, given cool water to drink and ice packs or cool wet cloths should be applied to the skin. If a victim refuses water, vomits, or loses consciousness, call 9-1-1 or the local emergency number immediately.

Heat-related illness is preventable. **The Red Cross offers the following tips for staying cool and safe this season:**

- **Dress for the heat.** Wear lightweight, light-colored clothing. Light colors will reflect away some of the sun's energy. It is also a good idea to wear hats or to use an umbrella.
- **Drink water.** Carry water or juice with you and drink continuously even if you do not feel thirsty. Avoid alcohol and caffeine, which dehydrate the body. Avoid using salt tablets unless directed to do so by a physician.
- **Eat small meals and eat more often.** Avoid high-protein foods, which increase metabolic heat.
- **Slow down. Avoid strenuous activity.** If you must do strenuous activity, do it during the coolest part of the day, which is usually in the morning between 4 and 7 a.m.
- **Stay indoors when possible.** If air-conditioning is not available, stay on the lowest floor out of the sunshine. Remember that electric fans do not cool, they simply circulate the air.
- **Be a good neighbor.** During heat waves, check in on elderly residents in your neighborhood and those who do not have air conditioning.
- **Learn Red Cross first aid and CPR.** While the above tips can help prevent emergencies, it is crucial to know what to do if an emergency situation arises.

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Know What These Heat-Related Terms Mean:

- **Heat cramps:** Heat cramps are muscular pains and spasms due to heavy exertion. Although heat cramps are the least severe, they are an early signal that the body is having trouble with the heat.
- **Heat exhaustion:** Heat exhaustion typically occurs when people exercise heavily or work in a hot, humid place where body fluids are lost through heavy sweating. Blood flow to the skin increases, causing blood flow to decrease to the vital organs. This results in a form of mild shock. If not treated, the victim may suffer heat stroke. Signals of heat exhaustion include cool, moist, pale flushed or red skin; heavy sweating; headache; nausea or vomiting; dizziness; and exhaustion. Body temperature will be near normal.
- **Heat stroke:** Also known as sunstroke, heat stroke is life-threatening. The victim's temperature control system, which produces sweating to cool the body, stops working. The body temperature can rise so high that brain damage and death may result if the body is not cooled quickly. Signals include hot, red and dry skin; changes in consciousness; rapid, weak pulse; and rapid, shallow breathing. Body temperature can be very high—sometimes as high as 105 F.

General Care for Heat Emergencies:

- **Heat cramps or heat exhaustion:** Get the person to a cooler place and have him or her rest in a comfortable position. If the person is fully awake and alert, give half a glass of cool water every 15 minutes. Do not let him or her drink too quickly. Do not give liquids that contain alcohol or caffeine. Remove or loosen tight clothing and apply cool, wet cloths, such as towels or sheets. Call 9-1-1 or the local emergency number if the person refuses water, vomits or loses consciousness.
- **Heat stroke:** Heat stroke is a life-threatening situation! Help is needed fast. Call 9-1-1 or your local emergency number. Move the person to a cooler place. Quickly cool the body. Immerse victim in a cool bath, or wrap wet sheets around the body and fan it. Watch for signals of breathing problems. Keep the person lying down and continue to cool the body any way you can. If the victim refuses water or is vomiting or there are changes in the level of consciousness, do not give anything to eat or drink.

For more information on heat safety, contact the American Red Cross at (401) 831-7700 or visit www.riredcross.org.

About the American Red Cross:

The American Red Cross shelters, feeds and provides emotional support to victims of disasters; supplies more than 40 percent of the nation's blood; teaches skills that save lives; provides international humanitarian aid; and supports military members and their families. The Red Cross is a not-for-profit organization that depends on volunteers and the generosity of the American public to perform its mission. For more information, please visit redcross.org or join our blog at <http://blog.redcross.org>.

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