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Division of Disease Control

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Health Advisory

Severe Heat Advisory August 1, 2006

The northeast United States is in the middle of a heath wave, with temperatures approaching the 100-degree mark. Philadelphia has already experienced numerous days of extreme heat and humidity this summer. Since June 24th, five Philadelphians have died of heat-related causes. Most of these individuals were elderly and suffered from underlying heart disease. In many cases, deaths due to heat exposure occur in residences without working fans or air conditioners.

Other groups at risk of suffering complications from extreme heat include people with chronic medical conditions, pregnant women, small children, those who work in a high heat environment, and persons engaged in strenuous physical activity.

With several weeks of hot weather ahead of us, the risk for further heat-related morbidity and mortality persists. Philadelphia's medical community can help the Health Department prevent further heat-related complications by educating patients about how they can stay cool.

Attached is a flier that provides prevention tips on avoiding heat-related illness. Please display and/or distribute this information to your patients, especially the elderly and persons in high-risk groups. Thank you for joining our efforts to educate and protect the health of Philadelphia residents during these hot summer months.



To avoid heat-related illness, the Philadelphia Department of Public Health recommends the following:

- Avoid, as much as possible, working or playing in the hot sun or other hot areas. If you must be out in the sun, wear a head covering. A wide-brimmed hat or visor will not only protect your head from intense sunshine, it will also provide a shield for your eyes.
- Use air conditioners and fans. Open windows to release trapped hot air.
- Those taking regular medication should consult with their physician. Some medication can cause an adverse reaction in hot weather.
- Wear lightweight clothing.
- Drink plenty of non-alcoholic liquids, warm or cool. Because the body loses fluids in the heat, drinking lots of liquids helps to avoid dehydration.
- Make certain pets have plenty of cool water to drink.
- Maintain a normal diet.
- Shower or bathe in water that is near skin temperature.
- Do not leave older people, children or pets alone in cars.
- The early warning signs of heat stress are decreased energy, slight loss of appetite, faintness, light-headedness and nausea. People experiencing these symptoms should go to a cool environment, drink liquids, remove excess clothing, and rest.
- Serious signs of heat stress include unconsciousness, rapid heartbeat, throbbing headache, dry skin, chest pain, mental confusion, irritability, vomiting, diarrhea, muscle cramps, staggering and difficulty breathing. People experiencing these symptoms should get to immediate medical attention. While waiting for help, move the person to a cool area, remove excess clothing, spray with water, and fan the person. In an emergency, dial 911.
- The City of Philadelphia operates several summer heat programs, including home visits by special field teams, enhanced daytime outreach for the homeless, and operation of the Philadelphia Corporation for Aging's "HeatLine" (215-765-9040). The "HeatLine" is activated whenever the National Weather Service and the Department of Public Health issue an excessive heat warning.