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Health Officials Advise Residents to Protect Themselves from Heat

Oak Park Department of Public Health officials are advising residents to protect themselves and their loved ones from the sometimes severe consequences of extreme heat.

“Recent experiences have shown that heat stroke and heat exhaustion occur quickly in times of extreme heat,” said Dr. Mark Loafman, the Health Department's medical consultant.

While everyone is susceptible to heat-related illnesses, certain people are at greater risk, according to Loafman, who added, “People should check on their neighbors periodically during these times, especially if they are elderly or have chronic diseases.”

Heat stroke and heat exhaustion can be deadly if unattended. Following the 1995 five-day heat wave when temperatures in area reached 104 degrees, hundreds of deaths were directly attributed to heat.

On excessively hot days, health officials recommend avoiding strenuous activity and staying inside whenever possible. Residents who don't have access to air conditioning are encouraged to take advantage of Oak Park's free cooling centers at Rush Oak Park Hospital, 520 S. Maple Ave., and West Suburban Hospital, 3 Erie Court. Free transportation is available by calling the Police Department's non-emergency telephone number, 386-3800.

Relief from the heat also can be found at the Oak Park Public Library, 834 Lake St. and Oak Park Township Senior Services, 418 S. Oak Park Ave. Seniors can call the Township at 383-8060 for a free ride.

Other suggestions for dealing with the heat include wearing lightweight, light-colored clothing and hats, drinking lots of water and taking regular breaks if involved in physical activity.

Signals of heat exhaustion include cool, moist, pale, flushed or red skin, heavy sweating, headache, nausea or vomiting and dizziness, although the body temperature will be near normal. Heat stroke, also known as sun stroke, is much more dangerous. Symptoms include abnormally hot, red and dry skin, changes in consciousness, rapid or weak pulse, vomiting and rapid, shallow breathing.

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Dealing with the heat

Anyone through to be suffering from a heat-related illness should immediately be taken to a cooler place. If the person is fully awake and alert, they should be given a half glass of cool water every 15 minutes. Liquids with alcohol or caffeine should be avoided. If the person refuses water, vomits or loses consciousness call 9-1-1 immediately.

For more information on heat-related issues, contact the Oak Park Department of Public Health at 358.5480 or email health@oak-park.us.

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