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Health officials warn of dangers of summer heat

Now that summer is officially here, local public health officials are advising residents to protect themselves and their loved ones from the potentially severe consequences of extreme heat.

“While everyone is susceptible to heat-related illnesses, certain people are at greater risk,” said Dr. Mark Loafman, Oak Park Department of Public Health medical consultant. “Older adults, young children and persons with chronic medical conditions are particularly susceptible to these illnesses and are at high risk for heat-related death.”

Heat-related illnesses occur when bodies are unable to properly cool themselves. 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 sunstroke, is much more dangerous. Symptoms include abnormally hot, red and dry skin, changes in consciousness, rapid or weak pulse, vomiting and rapid, shallow breathing.

Anyone thought to be suffering from a heat-related illness should be taken to a cooler place, and if fully awake and alert, 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.

When temperatures are extremely high, health officials recommend these preventative steps:

- Drink more fluids – nonalcoholic and noncaffeinated – regardless of activity level.
- Wear lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing.
- Never leave anyone in a closed, parked vehicle.
- Visit adults at risk at least twice a day and closely watch them for signs of heat exhaustion or heat stroke.
- Stay indoors and, if possible, stay in an air-conditioned place.

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**Summer heat
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Residents who do not 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, 708.386.3800.

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 708.383.8060 for a free ride.

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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