

Fact Sheet: Extreme Heat Events

Extreme heat events are becoming more frequent with the increased level of climate change. It is important to be knowledgeable about the risks of heat exposure and how to reduce potential impacts of heat.

What are Extreme Heat Events?

Extreme heat is when summertime temperatures are much hotter and/or humid than average. An extreme heat event is a period of at least two to three days, where there is high heat and/or humidity. The temperature threshold for extreme heat varies depending on location.

An increased number of extreme heat events are likely to be seen globally, including in areas that have not previously experienced extreme heat events.

Preparing for Heat

Prepare Your Residence: Preparing your house to keep heat out is essential to having a safe, cool space.

- Weather-strip doors and windows.
- Use window reflectors that are designed to reflect heat back out.
- Cover windows with drapes or shades.

Identify Cooling Centers: These are cool sites or air conditioned facilities open to the public to provide protection from the heat and allow people to cool down during hot days.

- Libraries, malls, and other public places can also act as a pseudo cooling centers.

Being Safe During Extreme Heat

There are several precautions that can be taken during high heat days to protect oneself from the impact of heat.

Stay Inside: Avoid the outdoors and stay inside in cool areas.

- Plan outdoor activities at times that will avoid the heat of the day.

Go to a Cooling Center.

Take Cool Showers or Baths: This is one of the best ways to cool down.

- Avoid relying on fans, as they can create a false sense of lowered body temperature.

Dress Properly: Wear loose, lightweight, and light-colored clothing, along with a hat.

Avoid Large Appliance Usage: Do not use your oven or dryer to reduce the heat in your home.

Find Shade: If outside, finding shady areas will help you stay cool.

Stay Hydrated: Drink plenty of fluids, even if you do not feel thirsty.

Keep Animals Indoors: Animals are also impacted by extreme heat.

- If animals must be outside, ensure they have cool water and access to shade.

For Additional Resources: Visit Heat.gov

Health Impacts

Heat has the potential to impact health in negative ways. Children under 4 years old, infants, the elderly, adults with preexisting conditions, outdoor workers, and pregnant people are all at a higher risk of negative health impacts from extreme heat. These include:

- An increased risk of hospitalization for those with heart disease.
- Heat related illnesses
- Worsening of asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)
- Dehydration which can lead to kidney injury and blood pressure problems. Some kidney damage can become irreversible with repeated or untreated injury.
- Violence, crime, and suicide may increase with temperature.

Tip: Many common medications can cause a higher risk of heat related illness. Check with your doctor or pharmacists to see if you may need to take extra precautions.

Heat-Related Illnesses

There are a variety of heat related illnesses. If not treated, heat related illnesses can have critical impacts.

Heat Cramps: Muscle pains/spasms in the arms, legs, or stomach.

Heat Exhaustion: Heavy sweating, dizziness, muscle cramps, tiredness, weakness, headache, nausea or vomiting, paleness, and fainting.

- Heat exhaustion can lead to heat stroke if not addressed.

Heat Rash: A mild rash caused by trapped sweat and blocked sweat ducts.

Heat Stroke: This is the most serious heat-related illness. The body's temperature rises rapidly, the sweating mechanism fails, and the body is unable to cool down. This leads to extremely high body temperatures.

- Common symptoms of heatstroke include a fever over 104°F, lack of sweating, seizures, fainting, and confusion.
- If heat stroke is suspected, immediately call 9-1-1 or go to a hospital.

Sunburn: Inflammation of the skin caused by an overexposure to ultraviolet rays.

References

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