Excessive Heat

In recent years, excessive heat has caused more deaths than all other weather events, including floods. You will likely hear weather forecasters use certain terms.

**Excessive Heat Watch:** Conditions are favorable for an excessive heat event to meet or exceed local excessive heat warning criteria in the next 24 to 72 hours.

**Excessive Heat Warning:** Heat index values are forecasted to meet or exceed locally defined warning criteria for at least 2 days (daytime highs equal 105°F–110°F).

**Heat Advisory:** Heat Index values are forecasted to meet locally defined advisory criteria for 1 to 2 days (daytime highs equal 100°F–105°F).

**Heat Safety**
- Listen to local weather forecasts and stay aware of upcoming temperature changes.
- Be aware of both the temperature and the heat index. The heat index is the temperature the body feels when the effects of heat and humidity are combined. Exposure to direct sunlight can increase the heat index by as much as 15°F.
- Discuss heat safety precautions with members of your household. Have a plan for wherever you spend time—home, work, and school—and prepare for the possibility of power outages.
- Check the contents of your emergency disaster kit in case a power outage occurs.
- Know those in your neighborhood who are older, young, sick, or overweight. They are more likely to become victims of excessive heat and may need help.
- If you do not have air conditioning, choose places you could go to for relief from the heat during the warmest part of the day (schools, libraries, theaters, malls).
- Be aware that people living in urban areas may be at greater risk from the effects of a prolonged heat wave than are people living in rural areas.
- Get trained in first aid to learn how to treat heat-related emergencies.
- Ensure that your animals’ needs for water and shade are met.

**Respond Appropriately**
- Listen to a NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) Weather Radio for critical updates from the National Weather Service (NWS).
- Never leave children or pets alone in enclosed vehicles.
- Drink plenty of fluids, even if you do not feel thirsty. Avoid drinks with caffeine or alcohol.
- Eat small meals and eat more often.
- Avoid extreme temperature changes.
- Wear loose-fitting, lightweight, light-colored clothing. Avoid dark colors because they absorb the sun’s rays.
- Slow down, stay indoors, and avoid strenuous exercise during the hottest part of the day.
- Postpone outdoor games and activities.
- Use a buddy system when working in excessive heat.
• Take frequent breaks if you must work outdoors.
• Check on family, friends, and neighbors who do not have air-conditioning, who spend much of their time alone, or who are more likely to be affected by the heat.
• Check on your animals frequently to ensure that they are not suffering from the heat.

Treating Heat-Related Illnesses
During heat waves, people are susceptible to three heat-related conditions. Here’s how to recognize and respond to them.

Heat cramps are muscular pains and spasms that usually occur in the legs or abdomen. Heat cramps are often an early sign that the body is having trouble with the heat.
• Get the person to a cooler place and have him or her rest in a comfortable position. Lightly stretch the affected muscle and gently massage the area.
• Give an electrolyte-containing fluid, such as a commercial sports drink, fruit juice, or milk. Water may also be given. Do not give the person salt tablets.

Heat exhaustion is a more severe condition. Heat exhaustion often affects athletes, firefighters, construction workers, and factory workers. It also affects those wearing heavy clothing in a hot, humid environment.
• Move the person to a cooler environment with circulating air. Remove or loosen as much clothing as possible and apply cool, wet cloths or towels to the skin. Fanning or spraying the person with water also can help. If the person is conscious, give small amounts of a cool fluid, such as a commercial sports drink or fruit juice, to restore fluids and electrolytes. Milk or water may also be given. Give about four ounces of fluid every 15 minutes.
• If the person’s condition does not improve, or if he or she refuses water, has a change in consciousness, or vomits, call 9-1-1 or the local emergency number.

Heat stroke is a life-threatening condition that usually occurs by ignoring the signals of heat exhaustion. Heat stroke develops when the body’s systems are overwhelmed by heat and begin to stop functioning.
• Signs of heat stroke include extremely high body temperature; red skin, which may be dry or moist; changes in consciousness; rapid, weak pulse; rapid, shallow breathing; confusion; vomiting; and seizures.
• Heat stroke is life-threatening. Call 9-1-1 or the local emergency number immediately.
• The preferred method of treatment is to rapidly cool the body by immersing the person up to the neck in cold water, if possible, or dousing or spraying the person with cold water.
• Sponge the person over the entire body with ice water-doused towels. Frequently rotate the cold, wet towels.
• Cover the person with bags of ice.
• If you are not able to measure and monitor the person’s temperature, apply rapid cooling methods for 20 minutes or until the person’s condition improves.