



Risk management



When you're hot, you're hot—but how hot is too hot?

Summer heat is here. It is important to keep your staff and patrons safe against the dangers associated with outdoor activities in hot weather. Overheating can be a real danger—even fatal—if not quickly addressed. Drinking water often, incorporating breaks, and limiting time in the heat are simple, effective things your center can do to prevent heat illness with your staff and your patrons.

Heat illness occurs when the body overheats, much the way your car can overheat in hot weather. Normally, the body's "coolant" system prevents overheating. As perspiration evaporates and blood vessels bring heat to the skin, the body cools and maintains a proper body temperature. When we are involved in outdoor activities in the heat, especially humid heat, our coolant system can become overloaded. When this happens, heart rate and body temperature rise and stress the body.

The hotter it gets, the more stress is placed on the body. The first signs of trouble can include fatigue, thirst, discomfort, and lightheadedness. This simple heat stress can quickly become heat exhaustion if early symptoms are ignored. Symptoms of heat exhaustion include a pale or flushed appearance, moist and clammy skin, weakness, dizziness, headache, and nausea. Untreated heat exhaustion can then become heat stroke. The heat stroke victim stops sweating and has hot, dry, reddish skin and a rapid pulse. They may be confused or delirious, may suffer convulsions, and may become unconscious.

The Center of Disease Control offers these tips for preventing heat-related illness:

- Provide fluids. Encourage everyone to drink—regardless of activity level—even before they get thirsty. Sugary drinks and cold drinks should be discouraged as they can cause a loss of body fluid and induce stomach cramps.
- For active programs with younger children, build water breaks into your schedule every 20 minutes.
- Use outdoor fans when you can. Note: when the temperature is in the high 90s, fans will not prevent heat-related illness. Bring your activities into the air-conditioned indoors when possible.
- Encourage everyone to wear lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing.
- Although anyone can suffer from heat-related illness, some people are at greater risk than others. Regularly monitor:
 - Infants and younger children
 - People aged 65 or older
 - People with disabilities

If your program must be out in the heat, consider the following:

- Limit your program activity to morning and evening hours when you can.
- Modify your program to reduce the amount of physical activity required.
- Try to utilize shady areas as much as possible.
- Encourage employees and participants to protect themselves from the heat and sun by wearing a wide-brimmed hat, sunglasses, and using a "broad spectrum / UVA/UVB protection" sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher.

The information provided in this article is intended for general informational purposes only and should not be considered as all encompassing, or suitable for all situations, conditions, and environments. Please contact us or your attorney if you have any questions.