

Maine CDC/DHHS Advises Caution as a Hot Week gets Hotter

The National Weather Services has issued a Heat Advisory for Kennebec County, Cumberland County, Oxford County, Androscoggin County, and York County. High heat combined with high humidity will result in a “heat index” (a measure that describes how hot it feels) above 100 degrees for these areas on Friday. These conditions come after several days of continuous heat, with daily temperatures above 90 in some places and unusually warm overnight temperatures. Because nearly half of Maine homes do not have any air conditioning, many may find it difficult to get relief from the extreme heat on Friday.

Extreme heat can be dangerous. **The Maine CDC is advising Mainers in Kennebec, Cumberland, Oxford, Androscoggin, and York Counties to take precautions to prevent heat illness, and to check on family, friends, and neighbors who might be especially vulnerable, such as those who are elderly and living alone. Healthcare and service providers and public health professionals are advised to check on vulnerable individuals in their care, be ready to recognize and respond to heat illness, and give prevention guidance to patients and clients.**

CHECK ON VULNERABLE GROUPS

Some groups of people, like those listed below, are more likely to experience illness from heat and should take extra precautions to keep cool. If you are a caregiver for someone in these groups, check on them frequently, make sure they have access to air conditioning, and watch for signs of serious illness. In general, encourage them to drink more fluids. If you are a health care provider, be prepared to advise patients who have fluid restrictions on appropriate fluid intake.

- Older adults (age 65 and older), especially those living alone
- Infants and young children
- People with a mental illness or who are under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- People who work outside
- Pregnant women
- People with mobility restrictions
- People with a chronic disease, such as heart disease, kidney disease, diabetes, obesity, or high blood pressure
- People taking certain medications, such as anti-cholinergics, anti-psychotics, anti-depressants, or diuretics
- People living in poverty and who are homeless

RECOGNIZE HEAT ILLNESS

Recognize and treat the signs of heat-related illnesses as early as possible to prevent serious illness and death.

Heat stroke is the most dangerous heat illness. Warning signs include hot, dry, red skin, no sweating, rapid pulse, body temperature above 105° F, headache, loss of alertness, confusion, rapid and shallow breathing, and unconsciousness or coma. If you see someone with these signs, call 911 immediately and move the person to a cool or shady place, loosen their clothes, and cool them rapidly with ice, fans, cool water, or wet cloths.

Heat exhaustion is less severe than heat stroke, and usually occurs when people over-exert themselves in high heat and humidity. Symptoms include heavy sweating, fainting, vomiting, cold, pale, and clammy skin, dizziness, headache, nausea and weakness. Move the person to a cool place, have them drink fluids and rest, loosen their clothes, and cool them off with water or wet cloths. Heat exhaustion can quickly lead to heat stroke. If symptoms worsen or do not improve, get medical help.

Other heat-related conditions include: heat cramps, dehydration, sunburn and heat rash.

More information on these groups is available at Maine CDC's Heat Illness page:
<http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/environmental-health/heat/>.

GUIDANCE FOR PREVENTING HEAT ILLNESS

Use Air Conditioning and Cool Water

- Use air conditioning to cool down or go someplace with air conditioning such as a store, library, restaurant, or cooling center.
- If you don't have air conditioning in your home, close windows, blinds, or curtains on the sunny side of your house, and open them on the shady side.
- Use cool water - take a cool shower or bath.
- Electric fans may provide some comfort, but when the temperature is in the high 90s, fans will not prevent heat-related illness. Taking a cool shower or bath, or moving to an air-conditioned place is a much better way to cool off.
- Wear loose, lightweight, light-colored clothing.
- Stay out of the sun as much as possible.
- Never leave anyone, especially children, pets, or those with special needs in a parked car - even briefly. Temperatures in the car can become dangerous within a few minutes.

Drink Fluids

- Drink more fluids regardless of your activity level.
- Avoid alcohol, caffeine, and sugary drinks, since these can cause you to become dehydrated.
- If you are on fluid restrictions or take diuretics, ask your doctor how much you should drink.

Lie Low - Rest Frequently

- Take regular breaks from physical activity – at least a few minutes every hour.
- Avoid strenuous activity during the hottest part of the day (between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m.).

If you work outside:

People who work outside or in other hot environments are more likely to become ill from heat. Workers need to be aware of the symptoms of heat-related illness and take preventive steps, including:

- Have lots water available and drink one cup every 15-20 minutes. Do not wait until you are thirsty. A sports drink can replace the salt and minerals you lose by sweating. If you are on a low-salt diet, talk with your doctor before drinking a sports beverage.
- Take frequent rest and water breaks in shady or air-conditioned areas.
- Increase rest time between work activities if heavy job tasks cannot be avoided.

If you must exercise outside:

- Limit outdoor activity to the morning and evening, unless air quality advisories are in effect and suggest further limiting activities during these hours. Air quality may change during a heat event; see the Maine Bureau of Air Quality Forecast (<http://www.maine.gov/dep/air/ozone/>) for updated air quality information.
- Drink two to four glasses of cool, non-alcoholic fluids each hour. A sports drink can replace the salt and minerals you lose by sweating. If you are on a low-salt diet, talk with your doctor before drinking a sports beverage.
- Rest often in shady areas – at least every hour.

- Protect yourself from the sun. Wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses. Put on sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher (the most effective products are labeled “broad spectrum” or “UVA/UVB protection”).
- Consider cancelling athletic events, or rescheduling them to earlier or later in the day to avoid hours when the heat index is above 95 in your area. Most weather reports or websites will list a “feels like” temperature as well as a measured temperature. This “feels like” temperature is equivalent to the heat index.

PREVENTING HEAT ILLNESS: COMMUNITIES

- Extend the hours of places that provide opportunities to cool off, such as pools, beaches, or public buildings with air conditioning.
- Make sure public events provide sufficient shade, drinks, and other cooling measures.
- Check on elderly people living alone and others who are more vulnerable to heat’s effects.
- Use communication channels to provide advice to the public on addressing the heat.
- Consider opening cooling centers. Cooling centers can be located in local senior centers, adult day service sites, health centers, libraries, churches, or businesses with air conditioning. Register cooling centers with 211.

For More Information: U.S. EPA’s Excessive Heat Events Guidebook for Communities
epa.gov/heatisland/about/heatguidebook.html

WHY BE CONCERNED ABOUT HIGH HEAT IN MAINE?

Heat is a serious health threat. Over the past 30 years in the U.S., more people have died from heat than from all other weather events combined. Prolonged hot weather can be especially deadly; more than 700 people died in a heat wave in Chicago in 1995.

Studies have shown that people who live in northern climates like Maine’s are more susceptible to heat than people in southern climates, and are affected at lower temperatures. This is likely because people in northern climates are less adapted to heat, and do not have good access to air conditioned spaces. Maine CDC data suggests that only half of Mainers have a home air conditioner, and that most of those who do, have window units which are less effective, and often not installed until after the first heat wave of the season.

The Maine CDC has found evidence of heat-related health effects in Maine. Rates of hospitalizations and Emergency Department (ED) visits for all causes – as well as for heart attack, cardiovascular diseases, kidney diseases, and diabetes – were significantly higher during the hottest days of the last decade than during the cooler days. And during heat waves in 2010, 2011, and 2012, Maine CDC saw notable increases in ED visits for heat illnesses using a near-real-time syndromic surveillance system.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Maine CDC Heat Illness Information

<http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/environmental-health/heat/>

Current Weather Conditions and Forecast

It is important to remember that the weather forecast can change quickly, so please monitor weather reports for the most up-to-date information. For weather forecast information, please contact the

National Weather Service's Gray Weather Forecast Office at 207-688-3216 or 207-688-3210 (recorded forecast), or visit their website: <http://www.weather.gov/gray>.

US CDC Extreme Heat Prevention Guide

http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/heat_guide.asp

US CDC Extreme Heat Media Toolkit

<http://www.cdc.gov/extremeheat/index.html>

National Weather Service Heat Wave Guide

http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/brochures/heat_wave.shtml