State of Minnesota
The Office of Ombudsman for
Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities
Heat Stroke Alert

This Medical Alert is based on the work of the Office of Ombudsman for Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities Medical Review Subcommittee and should be posted prominently. The Office of Ombudsman for Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities works to improve the services provided to people with disabilities by communicating important information found in the Medical Review Subcommittee's reviews of deaths and serious injuries. Thank you for promptly reporting deaths and serious injuries. You are helping us to meet our mission.

Heat and humidity put all people at risk for heat stroke or heat exhaustion. This Office has received reports of clients suffering and dying from heat stroke, because they live in very hot buildings or because they made some choices that caused their body temperature to rise to very dangerous levels. Certain medications may also be a factor.

Recipients of mental health, developmental disabilities and chemical dependency treatment may be at **added risk**:

- Because of living at a facility or other environment that has no air conditioning and/or poor air circulation.
- Because they may take medications or drugs that inhibit perspiration or increase fluid loss, such as diuretics, phenothiazines, anticholinergics, antihistamines, beta-blockers, benzodiazepines, amphetamines, neuroleptics (like Thorazine, Haldol, Prolixin, Navane), tricyclic antidepressants, cocaine, or alcohol.
- Because of being reluctant or unable to drink adequate amounts of non-caffeinated liquids.
- Because of the incapacity to make decisions that would reduce the risk, such as wearing appropriate summer clothing and eating light meals.

In order to **reduce the risk**, it becomes the responsibility of the facility and/or program staff to:

- Keep the environment as cool as possible.
- Review restricted fluid intake programs and provide extra liquids, including water, milk, fruit juice or non-caffeinated soda at meal times.
- Encourage non-caffeinated liquid intake.
- Know what medications put clients at particular risk, such as neuroleptics and diuretics.
- Make rounds and observe conditions at regular intervals during the day in order to ensure the health and safety of clients.

- Review activities for their appropriateness during hot weather. When appropriate, reduce, suspend, or conduct the activities in cool places or during a cooler period of the day.
- Limit intake of caffeine and alcohol as they can increase fluid loss.

Signs and Symptoms of Heat Stroke

Heat stroke occurs when the body is unable to regulate its temperature. The body's temperature rises rapidly, the sweating mechanism fails, and the body is unable to cool down. Body temperature may rise to 106°F or higher within **10 to 15 minutes**. Heat stroke can cause death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not provided.

Recognizing Heat Stroke

Warning signs of heat stroke vary but may include the following:

- An extremely high body temperature (above 103°F, orally)
- Red, hot, and dry skin (no sweating)
- Rapid, strong pulse
- Throbbing headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Confusion
- Unconsciousness

What to Do

If you see any of these signs, you may be dealing with a life-threatening emergency. Have someone call for immediate medical assistance while you begin cooling the victim. Do the following:

- Get the victim to a shady area.
- If emergency medical personnel are delayed, call the hospital emergency room for further instructions.
- Do not give the victim fluids to drink.
- Get medical assistance as soon as possible.

Heat stroke is a medical emergency. If you experience any heat stroke or heat exhaustion symptoms dial 911.

For more information on preventing heat related issues follow this URL to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website
http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/heat_guide-page-3.asp