

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. 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, because they participated in vigorous activities when outdoor temperatures are high, or because they or others made choices that caused their body temperature to rise to very dangerous levels.

Clients receiving services for mental health, developmental disabilities, emotional disturbances, and chemical dependency 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, anticholinergics, antihistamines, beta-blockers, benzodiazepines, amphetamines, neuroleptics and phenothiazines (like Thorazine, Haldol, Prolixin, Navane), tricyclic antidepressants, cocaine, or alcohol.
- Because of being reluctant or unable to drink adequate amounts of non-caffeinated liquids.

In order to **reduce the risk of heat stroke**:

- Keep the environment as cool as possible.
- Review approved fluid intake programs and when possible, provide extra water or other fluids.
- Encourage non-caffeinated and non-alcoholic 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.

Heat stroke is a medical emergency!

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 102°F, orally)
- Red, hot, and dry skin (no sweating)
- Rapid, weak pulse
- Throbbing headache
- Rapid, shallow breathing
- Dizziness or confusion
- Nausea
- Unconsciousness
- Seizures

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 shade.
- 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.

If you experience any heat stroke or heat exhaustion signs or symptoms dial 911.

For more information on preventing heat related issues:

[Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQ\) About Extreme Heat | Natural Disasters and Severe Weather | CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/faq.html)
(<https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/faq.html>)

[Extreme Heat Events - MN Dept. of Health \(state.mn.us\)](https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/climate/extremeheat.html)
(<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/climate/extremeheat.html>)