

This alert is for those who work with people receiving services for mental health, substance use, and developmental disabilities. When summer temperatures start increasing, staying safe can be a real challenge. Heat stroke is a serious condition that can affect many vulnerable people, and each year we receive reports of heat stroke.

What is heat stroke?

Heatstroke results when someone's body temperature rises very high, often because of being in a hot environment like a hot building or when it's hot outside, but it can also happen as a result of participation in vigorous activities when outdoor temperatures are high, or because someone made choices that caused their body temperature to rise to very dangerous levels. It can damage the brain as well as other organs, and it can be fatal.

Heat stroke occurs when the body is unable to regulate its temperature. The body's temperature rises quickly, 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. Signs and symptoms can include nausea, dizziness and/or confusion, rapid, shallow breathing, red, hot, and dry or damp skin, an extremely high body temperature (and above 102°F when checked by mouth), a throbbing headache, seizures, and unconsciousness or unresponsiveness. Posting or sharing [this infographic](https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/climate/docs/knowthesigns.pdf) describing signs and symptoms of heat stroke can help keep people safe (<https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/climate/docs/knowthesigns.pdf>)!

Heat stroke is a medical emergency! If you or someone around you experience(s) any heat stroke or heat exhaustion signs or symptoms, dial 911 immediately.

First aid and treatment

If you see any of the signs and symptoms described earlier, you may be dealing with a life-threatening emergency. Have someone call for immediate medical assistance (911) while you begin cooling the person.

Do the following:

- Get the person to shade or another cooler place and have them lie down.
- Apply cool water or ice packs to the skin to help cool them down.
- Do not give the person anything to drink.
- Get medical assistance as soon as possible.
- Report heat stroke that requires medical treatment to the Ombudsman Office as a Serious Injury.

Risk factors for heat stroke

- A lack of control over temperature regulation in their environment, which may have no air conditioning and/or poor air circulation.
- Taking medications or drugs that reduce the body's ability to sweat, or that increase fluid loss, such as diuretics, anticholinergics, antihistamines, beta-blockers, benzodiazepines, amphetamines, neuroleptics, phenothiazines, tricyclic antidepressants, lithium, cocaine, and alcohol.
- Being reluctant or unable to drink adequate amounts of non-caffeinated liquids.

Reducing the risk of heat stroke

- Drink plenty of fluids and/or provide plenty of fluids to those who need support. Sugary, alcoholic, and caffeinated beverages can increase the risk of dehydration. Enjoy and/or encourage fluid-rich foods, including fruits, veggies, and soups.
- If possible, schedule outdoor activities during the cooler parts of the day, such as early morning or evening. Take breaks in shaded or air-conditioned areas.
- Know what medications can put clients at risk and know who takes them (see above).
- Pay attention to weather forecasts and heat advisories. Plan ahead and adjust your activities based on the forecasted temperatures. Bring along lots of fluids.
- Post or share [this resource](https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/climate/docs/staysafe.pdf) (https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/environment/climate/docs/staysafe.pdf) with tips to stay safe when it's hot.
- Make a [Heat Action Plan](https://www.cdc.gov/heat-health/media/pdfs/Heat-and-Health-Guidance-Infographic-508.pdf) (https://www.cdc.gov/heat-health/media/pdfs/Heat-and-Health-Guidance-Infographic-508.pdf).
- Check on people as often as necessary and appropriate to ensure their health and safety.

Helpful links

For more information on preventing heat related issues:

[About Heat and Your Health | Heat Health | CDC](https://www.cdc.gov/heat-health/about/index.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fextreme-heat%2Fprevention%2Findex.html) (https://www.cdc.gov/heat-health/about/index.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fextreme-heat%2Fprevention%2Findex.html)

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