

Mecklenburg County ARES®

Are You Prepared For Extreme Heat?

Living in the Carolinas we need to be prepared for the very real threats posed by extreme heat. The four hottest months here are June, July, August and September. 103 degrees is the hottest recorded temperature in June and July. 104 degree temperatures have occurred in August and September. Summer is right around the corner and the combination of heat and humidity will be a constant threat during outside activities.

Heat kills by pushing the human body beyond its limits. In extreme heat and high humidity, evaporation is slowed and the body must work extra hard to maintain a normal temperature.

Most heat disorders occur because the victim has been overexposed to heat or has over-exercised for his or her age and physical condition. Older adults, young children, and those who are sick or overweight are more likely to succumb to extreme heat.

“Be aware of yourself and others’ risk for heat stroke, heat exhaustion, heat cramps and fainting. To avoid heat stress, you should:

- *Drink a glass of fluid every 15 to 20 minutes and at least one gallon each day, but avoid alcohol and caffeine. They both dehydrate the body.*
- *Wear light-colored, loose-fitting clothing and try to avoid being in direct sunlight for extended periods of time.*
- *When indoors without air conditioning, open windows and use fans. Un-air conditioned spaces can be 20 or more degrees hotter than the temperature outside.*
- *Take frequent cool showers or baths.*
- *If you feel dizzy, weak, or overheated, go to a cool place. Sit or lie down, drink water, and wash your face with cool water. If you don't feel better soon, get medical help quickly.*
- *Work during the cooler hours of the day when possible, or distribute the workload evenly throughout the day, taking breaks in an air conditioned place.*
- *Never, I repeat never, leave a child or pet in a car during summer.*

Heat stroke is the most serious heat illness. It happens when the body can't control its own temperature and its temperature rises rapidly. Sweating fails and the body cannot 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 care is not given.

Warning signs of heat stroke vary but can include:

- *Red, hot, and dry skin (no sweating)*
- *Rapid, strong pulse*
- *Throbbing headache*
- *Dizziness, nausea, confusion, or unconsciousness*
- *An extremely high body temperature (above 103°F)*

If you suspect someone has heat stroke, follow these instructions:

- *Immediately call for medical attention.*
- *Get the person to a cool area.*
- *Cool the person rapidly by immersing him/her in cool water or a cool shower, or spraying or sponging him/her with cool water. If the humidity is low, wrap the person in a cool, wet sheet and fan him/her vigorously.*
- *Monitor their body temperature and continue cooling efforts until the body temperature drops to 101-102°F.*
- *Give them small sips of cool water because large quantities may cause nausea and vomiting. Do not give the person alcohol to drink. Get medical assistance as soon as possible.*
- *If emergency medical personnel do not arrive quickly, call the hospital emergency room for further instructions.¹*

We all know that disasters come in many different forms and can strike quickly and without warning. Extreme heat is just another form of a natural disaster which requires us to be informed and be prepared especially during the summer months. When the temperatures rise above 80 degrees the incidence of heat related disorders greatly increases.

As an ARES volunteer you may be called to help your community during the hot summer. Be sure that you take the prevailing weather conditions into consideration and wear the proper clothing and bring plenty of water. Your awareness of the signs of heat stress may also save the lives of others.

¹ www.fema.gov