

HOW SENIORS CAN KEEP COOL DURING SUMMER HEAT WAVES

SACRAMENTO - State Aging Director Lynda Terry today urged caregivers and families of frail elderly and adults with disabilities to take extra precautions to help them stay cool and safe during hot summer months.

"We want to get the word out to families, friends, neighbors and caregivers to ensure that older and more vulnerable Californians are safe and comfortable during summer heat waves," said Terry. "For some seniors and adults with disabilities, high temperatures can lead to serious illness, hospitalization and even death."

Two common problems caused by exposure to excessive heat are heat stroke and heat exhaustion. Director Terry offers these easy tips for keeping cool:

1. Eat lightly and drink plenty of fluids. Non-caffeine and non-alcoholic beverages help prevent dehydration.
2. Wear lightweight, light colored and loose fitting clothing.
3. Keep a container of cool water nearby and use wet washcloths to pat the wrists, face and back of neck or, for a quick cool down, wrap ice cubes in a washcloth or use blue cooler packs.
4. Use small battery operated hand-held fans and misters for a cooling break.
5. Schedule outside activities before Noon or in the evening.
6. Wear a wide-brimmed hat when in the sun.
7. Stay in the coolest part of the house - usually on the lowest floor - as much as possible.
8. A shady spot outdoors may be cooler than the house, especially if there's a breeze.
9. Mobile seniors may want to spend a few hours at the library, in a movie or at a mall or restaurant that is air conditioned to stay cool, enjoy a social outing and conserve energy.

Below are tips for cooling the home:

1. Use portable and ceiling fans in frequently used rooms to substitute for or assist the air conditioner.
2. If it is safe to do so, leave windows open at night. Open windows on two sides to create cross ventilation.
3. Place a piece of cardboard covered with aluminum foil in sunny windows to reflect sunlight and heat away from the house.
4. Close shades or draperies on sunny windows.
5. Vacuum, clean or replace air filters regularly for maximum cooling efficiency.
6. If affordable, install outdoor awnings or sunscreens.

Heat Stroke and Heat Exhaustion

Heat stroke occurs when the body is unable to control its temperature. The body's temperature rises rapidly to 106° Fahrenheit or higher, the sweating mechanism fails and the body can't cool down. Heat stroke can cause death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not administered. Those most prone to heat exhaustion are elderly and people working or exercising in a hot environment.

Warning signs of heat stroke vary, but may include:

- An extremely high body temperature (above 103° Fahrenheit, orally).
- Unconsciousness.
- Dizziness, nausea and confusion.
- Red, hot and dry skin (no sweating).
- Rapid and strong pulse.
- Throbbing headache.

Warning signs of heat exhaustion vary, but may include:

- Heavy sweating.
- Muscle cramps.
- Weakness.
- Headache.
- Nausea or vomiting.
- Paleness, tiredness and dizziness.

What to Do

Call for immediate medical assistance and begin cooling the victim:

- Get the person to a shady area.
- Cool rapidly by immersing him or her in a tub of cool water; placing in a cool shower; spraying with cool water from a garden hose; sponging with cool water; or if the humidity is low, wrapping the person in a cool, wet sheet and fanning him or her vigorously.
- Monitor body temperature and continue cooling efforts until the body temperature drops to 101°-102° Fahrenheit.
- Get medical assistance as soon as possible. If emergency medical is delayed, call a hospital emergency room for further instructions.

Sometimes a victim's muscles will begin to twitch uncontrollably as a result of heat stroke. If this occurs, keep the victim from injury but do not place any objects in the mouth and do not give fluids. If there is vomiting, make sure the airway remains open by turning the victim on his or her side.