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Health officials advise Oregonians to use common sense in extreme heat

The triple-digit temperatures predicted for the next few days mean people need to take precautions to protect themselves from the extreme heat, say Oregon public health officials.

Forecasters predict temperatures will begin to rise again into the 90s starting Saturday and remain there through at least Wednesday. Predictions say Monday and Tuesday will bring temperatures topping 100 degrees. Areas of Southern Oregon may reach 105 degrees on Sunday.

When temperatures rise quickly, particularly in regions that don't typically have extreme heat, there are numerous health issues that can arise. Oregon Public Health director Mel Kohn, M.D., advises people to be aware of the warning signs of heat-related illness such as heat exhaustion and heat stroke and to take steps to prevent them from happening. Kohn says the symptoms of heat exhaustion include muscle cramps, weakness, heavy sweating, headache and vomiting.

"People should pay close attention during heat waves such as these, especially seniors, the very young and people with chronic illness who are most at risk," says Dr. Kohn. "I encourage checking regularly on elderly neighbors because the higher temperatures put more stress on their bodies."

A heat stroke is the most severe of heat-related problems and can be life-threatening. Common symptoms include high body temperature, rapid pulse, difficulty breathing, confusion, dry skin, nausea and headache.

The key to avoiding heat-related sickness is to stay hydrated, stay cool, and use common sense.

“Your best protection during this hot weather is to drink plenty of liquids even when you are not thirsty and to stay inside or in the shade whenever possible,” says Dr. Kohn.

Top 10 tips to prevent heat-related illness

- Never leave infants, children or pets unattended in a parked car. It can take as little as 10 minutes for temperatures inside a car to rise to deadly levels;
- Regardless of your level of activity drink plenty of fluids even if you are not thirsty and especially when working outside;
- Limit exposure to the sun from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. when UV rays are strongest. Try to schedule activities in the morning and evening;
- Drink fruit juice or sports drinks to replace salts and minerals;
- Wear loose-fitting clothing to keep cool and to protect your skin from the sun;
- Use sunscreen at least SPF 15, apply it at least 10 minutes before going outside and re-apply every two hours;
- Use fans as needed;
- Open windows to allow fresh air to circulate, especially during morning and evening hours, and close shades on west-facing windows during the afternoon hours;
- Use cool compresses, misting, showers and baths; and,
- Avoid hot foods and heavy meals; they add heat to the body.

Additional information on how to avoid heat-related illness is on the Web at www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/ and at www.nws.noaa.gov/os/brochures/heat_wave.shtml.