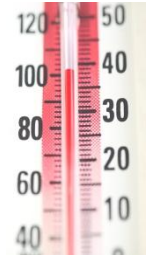


**Department of Human Services  
Office of Program Integrity and Accountability**



**HEALTH AND SAFETY ALERT FOR CAREGIVERS  
WARM WEATHER DANGERS**

The purpose of this alert is to make caregivers aware that it is especially important to be mindful of the individuals in their care when the weather is warm. Overexposure to the sun and heat can result in conditions ranging from a simple sunburn that causes moderate pain, to sun or heat stroke that can lead to delirium, coma and even death if the symptoms are not recognized and quickly addressed. The elderly, the very young, and individuals with chronic illnesses are especially at risk, as are individuals who take certain medications that are known to heighten sensitivity to the heat and sun.

**Proactive Measures to Avoid Heat Related Illness**

Caregivers should be aware of individuals in their care who have risk factors for heat related illness and observe them at regular intervals. Caregivers should:

- Never leave anyone in a parked vehicle with the windows closed for any length of time.
- Help consumers avoid being in the sun between 10 AM and 4 PM,
- Have consumers take frequent breaks when participating in physical activities outdoors,
- Make sure consumers are wearing light-colored loose-fitting clothing (dark colors absorb heat, loose clothing allows air to circulate and cool the body)
- Use sun block with a sun protection factor (SPF) on consumers whenever out-of-doors, and consult a doctor to learn if a prescription is required for the use of sun screen, or if a lip balm with sun screen should be used. The doctor will advise as to what the SPF should be and how often it should be applied,
- Have consumers wear a hat, especially if hair is thin on top,
- Have consumers wear sunglasses that absorb at least 90% UV rays (check the label on the sunglasses),
- Come in out of the sun when the skin first begins to turn pink,
- Ensure consumers drink at least 8 glasses of water a day, and more in hot weather (unless on fluid restriction, when a doctor should be consulted),
- Have consumers avoid caffeinated beverages and alcohol, which increase fluid loss,
- Make sure consumers eat regular, light meals,
- Help consumers seek open, shaded areas outdoors and use fans and air conditioning indoors,
- If there is no air conditioning:
  - ✓ At night, open windows to allow for cross ventilation of cooler outdoor air
  - ✓ During the day, try to spend time in a building that is air conditioned, such as a shopping mall or public library
  - ✓ At home, keep blinds drawn, windows open for cross ventilation, and move to cooler rooms
- Have consumers take cool showers or baths.

**Dangers from overexposure to the sun and heat**

**Sunburn** – Sunburn is an indication of damage to the skin caused by overexposure to the sun. Sunburn is slight reddening of the skin, accompanied by varying degrees of pain, which can result from as little as 15 minute in the sun. More intense exposure can lead to itching, peeling skin, rash, nausea and fever. In the most severe cases, sunburn can be a first or second degree burn and require immediate medical attention.

**Dehydration** – Overexposure to the heat and sun can lead to dehydration, which is the loss of body fluids and electrolytes due to profuse sweating and an inadequate intake of water. Some common signs of dehydration are: thirst, dark colored urine or reduced urination, altered mood, poor concentration or confusion, drowsiness or fatigue, irritability, weak pulse, cold white hands and feet, dry, loose, or wrinkled skin and eventual loss of consciousness

**Sun Stroke or Heat Stroke** – Sun/heat stroke is the consequence of a series of events that begin with dehydration. As the body's core temperature rises, dehydration turns to heat exhaustion. If the situation is not rectified quickly, heat stroke can result as the body's organs shut down due to the lack of vital fluids and nutrients. Heat stroke can lead to delirium, coma, and eventually death!

**DISCLAIMER**

**This material is being provided strictly to alert providers about the dangers of exposure to heat and sun. At no time is this alert to substitute for training nor is it to suffice as training. Providers who have been trained in how to address the issue of sunburn and dehydration still are required to implement their training.**