

Staying Cool and Hydrated in Canadian Summers

Heat-related emergencies occur when the body becomes dehydrated, which may result in an increased body temperature. Heat cramps, heat exhaustion, or heat stroke, can happen to anyone who stays in the summer heat and sun for too long.

Young children, the elderly, those with chronic illnesses such as heart disease, and those taking certain medications can become ill in hot, humid weather faster than healthy adults.

It is important for everyone enjoying the outdoors to know how to prevent heat emergencies, recognize when someone has been in the heat for too long, and be able to provide help when needed.

The Signs and Symptoms of Heat-Related Emergencies

- Cramps or muscle tightening, usually in the legs and abdomen but they can be in other parts of the body
- Headache
- Nausea
- Dizziness, weakness, and feeling faint
- Skin that is redder or paler than usual, or moist skin
- Rapid shallow breathing
- Irritable, bizzare, or aggressive behaviour

How to Help

- Move the person to a cooler location
- Give the person cool water to drink in sips
- Have the person loosen any tight clothing
- Fan the person
- Put cool water on the person's skin
- If the person's condition is severe, put covered ice packs in each armpit and on the back of the person's neck
- Call for help (EMS/9-1-1)

When you're hot you sweat more than normal, so you need to drink more to replace the water your body is losing. Drink plenty of cool fluids, even if you do not feel thirsty, but avoid caffeine and alcohol. They can cause dehydration, which stops your body from controlling its temperature properly.

Preventing Heat-Related Emergencies

- **Drink plenty of cool fluids**—this is the most important step you can take.
- **Avoid being outside** during the hottest part of the day.
- **Know the humidex rating**—it combines the temperature and humidity to indicate how hot, humid weather feels to the average person.
- **Wear light, loose clothing** to let air circulate and heat escape and always wear a hat.
- **Apply sunscreen** (with SPF 15 or higher) as sunburned skin reduces the body's ability to cool itself.
- **Slow down your activities** as it gets hotter and don't work, exercise, or play for too long at a time.
- **Take a lot of breaks in a cool or shady area** to let your body cool off. This will help if you do need to be outside when it's really hot.