



Together, we can save a life

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NEWS RELEASE

Berks County Chapter
701 Centre Avenue
Reading, PA 19601
www.berks.redcross.org

Contact: Adrian Grieve
Phone: (610) 375-4383
Mobile: (484) 955-3336
agrieve@berks.redcross.org

Soaring Temperatures Pose Increased Health Threats Take Precautions to Beat the Heat

(Reading, PA, July 14, 2006) As the potential for a heat wave intensifies this coming weekend, your local American Red Cross urges people need to take special precautions in dealing with prolonged exposure to high temperatures.

“Heat can kill by pushing the human body beyond its limits. In extreme heat and high humidity, the body must work extra hard to maintain a normal temperature,” according to Adrian Grieve, Executive Director. “All across the Northeast, elderly people, young children, and those who are sick or overweight are more likely to become victims of extreme summertime heat.”

“This can be especially problematic in cities. In urban areas stagnant atmospheric conditions often trap pollutants, mixing unhealthy air with excessively hot temperatures. Asphalt and concrete may store heat longer, as well, gradually releasing it at night” Grieve adds. “These higher temperatures create a potent blend of heat and chemicals call the *urban heat island effect*. Health risks are increased, especially for those with respiratory difficulties.”

Take care this summer to beat the heat:

- **NEVER leave children or pets alone in closed vehicles.** Temperatures inside a closed vehicle can reach over 140 degrees F within minutes. Exposure to such high temperatures can kill in minutes.

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AMERICAN RED CROSS – Add One

- **Air conditioning provides the safest escape from extreme heat - there are ways to maximize how it can work for you:** Install window air conditioners snugly. Check air-conditioning ducts for proper insulation. Vacuum air conditioner filters weekly during periods of high use to provide more cool air. Make sure your home is properly insulated, too. This will help conserve electricity and reduce your home's power demands for air conditioning.
- If your home does not have air conditioning, go elsewhere to get relief during the warmest part of the day. Stay indoors as much as possible, on the lowest floor out of the sunshine. Keep heat outside and cool air inside, closing any doors or windows that may allow heat in. Consider keeping storm windows installed throughout the year to keep the heat out of a house. **Plan to check on family, friends, and neighbors – especially the elderly - who do not have air conditioning or who spend much of their time alone.**
- **Wear loose-fitting, lightweight, light-colored clothing that will cover as much skin as possible.** Lightweight, light-colored clothing reflects heat and sunlight and helps maintain normal body temperature. Cover as much skin as possible to avoid sunburn and over-warming effects of sunlight on your body. Protect your face and head by wearing a wide-brimmed hat, which will keep direct sunlight off your head and face. Sunlight can burn and warm the inner core of your body.
- **Drink plenty of water and other fluids even if you do not feel thirsty.** Injury and death can occur from dehydration, which can happen quickly and unnoticed. Symptoms of dehydration are often confused with other causes. Your body needs water to keep cool. Water is the safest liquid to drink during heat emergencies.
- **Avoid drinks with alcohol or caffeine in them.** They can make you feel good briefly, but make the heat's effects on your body worse. This is especially true about beer, which actually dehydrates the body. Persons who have epilepsy or heart, kidney, or liver disease; who are on fluid-restrictive diets; or who have a problem with fluid retention should consult a doctor before increasing liquid intake.
- **Slow down. Avoid strenuous activity.** Reduce, eliminate or reschedule strenuous activities. Get plenty of rest to allow your natural "cooling system" to work. If you must do strenuous activity, do it during the coolest part of the day, which is usually in the morning between 4:00 a.m. and 7:00 a.m.
- **Take frequent breaks if you must work outdoors. Use a buddy system when working in extreme heat.** Partners can keep an eye on each other and can assist each other when needed. Sometimes exposure to heat can cloud judgment. Chances are if you work alone, you may not notice this.

AMERICAN RED CROSS – Add Two

- **Get training and be alert to heat related illness symptoms.** Take an American Red Cross First Aid course to learn how to treat heat and other emergencies. Everyone should know how to respond, because the effects of heat can happen very quickly. Watch for these health signals:
- **Heat cramps:** Heat cramps are muscular pains and spasms due to heavy exertion. Although heat cramps are the least severe, they are often the first signal that the body is having trouble with the heat. Get the person to a cooler place and have him or her rest in a comfortable position. Lightly stretch the affected muscle and replenish fluids. Give a half glass of cool water every 15 minutes. Do not give liquids with alcohol or caffeine in them, as they can cause further dehydration and make conditions worse.
- **Heat exhaustion:** Cool, moist, pale, or flushed skin; heavy sweating; headache; nausea or vomiting; dizziness and exhaustion. One's body temperature may be normal, or is likely to be rising. Get the person out of the heat and into a cooler place. Remove or loosen tight clothing and apply cool, wet cloths such as towels or sheets. If the person is conscious, give cool water to drink. Make sure the person drinks slowly. Give a half glass of cool water every 15 minutes. Let the victim rest in a comfortable position, and watch carefully for changes in his or her condition.
- **Heat stroke:** Hot, red skin; changes in consciousness; rapid, weak pulse and rapid, shallow breathing. Body temperature can be very high--sometimes as high as 105 degrees F. If the person was sweating from heavy work or exercise, skin may be wet; otherwise, it will feel dry. Heat stroke is a life-threatening situation. Help is needed fast. **Call 9-1-1 or your local emergency number.**

The American Red Cross is where people mobilize to help their neighbors—across the street, across the country and across the world—in emergencies. Each year, in communities large and small, victims of some 70,000 disasters turn to neighbors familiar and new—the nearly 1 million volunteers and 35,000 employees of the Red Cross. Through almost 815 locally supported chapters, more than 15 million people gain the skills they need to prepare for and respond to emergencies in their homes, communities and world. Some 4 million people give blood—the gift of life—through the Red Cross, making it the largest supplier of blood and blood products in the United States. The Red Cross helps thousands of U.S. service members separated from their families by military duty stay connected. As part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, a global network of 181 national societies, the Red Cross helps restore hope and dignity to the world's most vulnerable people. An average of 91 cents of every dollar the Red Cross spends is invested in humanitarian services and programs. The Red Cross is not a government agency; it relies on donations of time, money, and blood to do its work.