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PINELLAS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

July 10, 2007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Stay safe and healthy during extreme heat

Our bodies normally cool by sweating. But under some conditions, sweating just isn't enough. In such cases, your body temperature rises rapidly. Very high body temperatures may lead to heat stroke – damaging the brain or other vital organs and can lead to death.

When the humidity is high, sweat doesn't evaporate as quickly, which prevents your body from releasing heat quickly. Other conditions related to risk include age, obesity, fever, dehydration, heart disease, mental illness, poor circulation, sunburn and prescription drug and alcohol use.

To protect your health when temperatures are high, remember to keep cool and use common sense. The following tips from the Pinellas County Health Department are important:

- **Drink plenty of fluids.** During hot weather you'll need to increase your fluid intake, regardless of your activity level. Don't wait until you're thirsty to drink. By then you may already be dehydrated. If you work outdoors, drink two to four glasses of cool fluids every hour. If your doctor generally limits the amount of fluid you drink or has you on water pills, ask how much you should drink while the weather is hot.
- **Don't drink liquids that contain alcohol** or large amounts of sugar. They actually cause you to lose more body fluid. Also avoid very cold drinks, because they can cause stomach cramps.
- **Replace salt and minerals.** Heavy sweating removes salt and minerals from your body. These are necessary for your body. A sports beverage can replace the salt and minerals you lose in sweat. However, if you are on a low-salt diet, talk with your doctor before drinking a sports beverage.
- **Wear appropriate clothing and sunscreen.** Choose lightweight, light-colored and loose-fitting clothing. Besides causing pain and skin damage, sunburn affects your body's ability to cool and causes a loss of body fluids. If you must go outdoors, protect yourself from the sun by wearing a wide-brimmed hat (also keeps you cooler) along with sunglasses and apply sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher 30 minutes before going out. Continue to reapply sunscreen according to the package directions.
- **Schedule outdoor activities carefully.** If you must be outdoors, try to limit your outdoor activity to morning and evening hours. If you work outdoors, try to rest as frequently as possible in shady areas so that your body's thermostat will have a chance to recover.
- **Pace yourself.** If you aren't used to working a hot environment, start slowly and pick up the pace gradually. If exertion in the heat makes your heart pound and leaves you gasping for breath, stop all activity. Get into a cool area, or at least into the shade, and rest, especially if you become lightheaded, confused, weak or feel faint.
- **Stay Cool Indoors.** Stay indoors and, if possible, stay in an air-conditioned place. If your home doesn't have air conditioning, try to go to the shopping mall or public library. Even a few hours spent in air conditioning can help your body stay cooler when you go back into the heat.

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- **Electric fans will not prevent heat-related illness when the temperature is in the 90's.** They will provide some comfort only. Taking a cool shower or moving to an air-conditioned place is a much better way to cool off.
- **Use a buddy system.** When working in the heat, check on your neighbors and have someone do the same for you. Heat-related illness can cause a person to become confused or lose consciousness. If you're 65 years of age or older, have someone check on you twice a day. If you know someone in this age group, check on them at least twice a day if they do not have air-conditioning.
- **Monitor those at risk.** Although any one can suffer from heat-related illness, some people are at greater risk than others. Visit these individuals at least twice a day and watch them for signs of heat exhaustion or heat stroke. Infants and young children, of course, need much more frequent watching.
 - ♦ **Infants and children** up to four years of age are sensitive to the effects of high temperatures and need others to regulate their environments and provide adequate liquids.
 - ♦ **People 65 years of age or older** may not compensate for heat stress efficiently and are less likely to sense and respond to change in temperature.
 - ♦ **People who are overweight** may be prone to heat sickness because of their tendency to retain more body heat.
 - ♦ **People who overexert** (do too much) during work or exercise may become dehydrated and susceptible to heat sickness.
 - ♦ **People who are physically ill**, especially with heart disease or high blood pressure, or those who take certain medications, such as for depression, insomnia or poor circulation, may be more at risk during extreme heat.

Even short periods of high temperatures can cause serious health problems. Doing too much on a hot day, spending too much time in the sun or staying too long in an overheated place can cause heat-related illnesses. **Know the symptoms of heat disorders and overexposure to the sun, and be ready to give first aid treatment or call for help.**

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BACKGROUNDER INCLUDED:

Heat-related illness



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BACKGROUND:
Signs and Symptoms of Heat-Related Illnesses

Heat Rash

Heat rash is a skin irritation caused by excessive sweating during hot, humid weather. It can occur at any age but is most common in young children.

Recognizing heat rash – Heat rash looks like a red cluster of pimples or small blisters. It is more likely to occur on the neck and upper chest, in the groin, under the breasts, and in elbow creases.

What to do: The best treatment for heat rash is to provide a cooler, less humid environment. Keep the affected area dry. You may use dusting powder, but avoid using ointments or creams because they keep your skin warm and moist and may make the condition worse. Treating heat rash is simple and usually does not require medical assistance. Other heat-related problems can be much more severe.

Sunburn

Sunburn damages your skin. That's why it's important to wear sunscreen and take steps to avoid exposure to the sun. Although the discomfort of sunburn is usually minor and healing often occurs in about a week, severe sunburn may require medical attention.

Recognizing sunburn – Symptoms of sunburn are well known: the skin becomes red, painful, and abnormally warm after sun exposure.

What to do: Consult a doctor if the sunburn affects an infant younger than age one or if these symptoms are present:

- Fever
- Fluid-filled blisters
- Severe pain

Tips for treating sunburn:

- If you're sunburned, do not go back out into the sun.
- Apply cold compresses or immerse the sunburned area in cool water.
- Apply aloe or moisturizing lotion to affected areas. Do not use salve, butter, or ointment.
- Do not break blisters.

Heat Cramps

Heat cramps can affect you if you sweat a lot during strenuous activity. The sweating depletes your body's salt and moisture. The low salt level in the muscles causes painful cramps. Heat cramps may also be a symptom of heat exhaustion.

Recognizing heat cramps: Heat cramps are muscle pains or spasms – usually in your abdomen, arms or legs – that may occur in association with strenuous activity. If you have heart problems or are on a low-sodium diet, get medical attention for heat cramps.

What to do:

- Stop all activity, and sit quietly in a cool place.
- Drink clear juice or a sports beverage.
- Do not return to strenuous activity for a few hours after the cramps subside, because returning to hard work may lead to heat exhaustion or heat stroke.
- Seek medical attention for heat cramps if they do not subside in one hour.

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Heat Exhaustion

Heat exhaustion is a heat-related illness that can develop after several days of being in high temperatures and inadequate or unbalanced replacement of fluids. It is your body's response to an excessive loss of the water and salt contained in sweat. Those most prone to heat exhaustion are elderly people, people with high blood pressure and people working in a hot environment.

Recognizing heat exhaustion – Warning signs of heat exhaustion include:

- Heavy sweating
- Paleness
- Muscle cramps
- Tiredness
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Nausea or vomiting
- Fainting
- Your skin may be cool and moist
- Your pulse rate will be fast and weak
- Your breathing will be fast and shallow.

If heat exhaustion is not treated, it may progress to heat stroke – a medical emergency.

Seek medical attention immediately if your symptoms are severe or if you have heart problems or high blood pressure. Otherwise, cool off and seek medical attention if your symptoms get worse or last longer than one hour.

What to do:

Cooling measures that may be effective include the following:

- Drinking cool, nonalcoholic beverages
- Getting rest
- Taking a cool shower, bath, or sponge bath
- Getting to an air-conditioned environment
- Wearing lightweight clothing

Heat Stroke

Heat stroke occurs when your body is unable to regulate its own temperature. Your temperature rises rapidly, the sweating mechanism fails and your body is unable to cool down. Your temperature may rise to 106°F or higher very rapidly – within 10 to 15 minutes.

Remember: Heat stroke is a medical emergency!

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Recognizing Heat Stroke – Warning signs of heat stroke vary, but may include the following:

- An extremely high body temperature (above 103°F, orally)
- Red, hot, and dry skin (no sweating)
- Rapid, strong pulse
- Throbbing headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Confusion
- Unconsciousness

What to Do:

Heat stroke is a medical emergency. Have someone call for immediate medical assistance while you begin cooling the victim.

- Get the victim to a shady area.
- Cool the victim rapidly using whatever methods you can. You can try the following:
 - Immerse the victim in a tub of cool water
 - Place the person in a cool shower or spray the victim with cool water from a garden hose
 - Sponge the person with cool water
 - If the humidity is low, wrap the victim in a cool, wet sheet and fan him or her vigorously.
- Monitor the victim's body temperature and continue with your cooling efforts until the body temperature drops to 101-102°F.
- Do not give the victim fluids to drink.
- Sometimes a heat stroke victim's muscles will twitch uncontrollably as a result of the heat stroke. If this happens, keep the victim safe, but do not place any object in the mouth.
- If the victim is vomiting, make sure the airway remains open by turning the victim on his or her side.

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