

It's A Heat Wave!

How to prepare for, avoid, and handle heat-related illnesses.



Warm weather means activities and fun under the sun! Whether you love putting on shorts and feeling the warm outdoors, or find it hot and sticky, everyone must be careful not to let a heat-related illness spoil the day.

Normally, the body has ways of keeping itself cool, by letting heat escape through the skin, and by evaporating sweat (perspiration). If the body does not cool properly or does not cool enough, a person may suffer a heat-related illness. Anyone can be susceptible although the very young and very old are at greater risk. Heat-related illnesses can become serious or even deadly if unattended.

For the members of our VSU Family who work outdoors, please take special note of the following tips. Not all tips can be applied during or at work, but your safety is our number one concern, if you are not feeling well, let your supervisor know as soon as possible!

Preventing Heat-Related Illness

- **Dress for the heat.** When possible, wear lightweight, light-colored clothing. Light colors will reflect away some of the sun's energy. It is also a good idea to wear hats or to use an umbrella.
- **Drink water.** Carry water or juice with you and drink continuously even if you do not feel thirsty. Avoid alcohol and caffeine, which dehydrate the body.
- **Eat small meals and eat more often.** Avoid foods that are high in protein which increase metabolic heat.
- **Slow down.** When able, avoid strenuous activity. If you must do strenuous activity, do it during the cooler parts of the day.
- **Take regular breaks** when engaged in physical activity on warm days. Take time out to find a cool place. If you recognize that you, or someone else, is showing signs of a heat-related illness, stop activity and find a cool place.

Know What Heat-Related Terms Mean

- **Heat Wave:** More than 48 hours of high heat (90°F or higher) and high humidity (80 percent relative humidity or higher) are expected.
- **Heat Index:** A number in degrees Fahrenheit that tells how hot it really feels with the heat and humidity. Exposure to full sunshine can increase the heat index by 15° F.
- **Heat cramps:** Heat cramps are muscular pains and spasms due to heavy exertion. They usually involve the abdominal muscles or the legs. It is generally thought that the loss of water and salt from heavy sweating causes the cramps.
- **Heat Exhaustion:** Heat exhaustion is less dangerous than heat stroke. It typically occurs when people exercise heavily or work in a warm, humid place where body fluids are lost through heavy sweating. Fluid loss causes blood flow to decrease in the vital organs, resulting in a form of shock. With heat exhaustion, sweat does not evaporate as it should, possibly because of high humidity or too many layers of clothing. As a result, the body is not cooled properly.
- **Heat Stroke:** Also known as sunstroke, heat stroke is life-threatening. The victim's temperature control system, which produces sweating to cool the body, stops working. The body temperature can rise so high that brain damage and death may result if the body is not cooled quickly.

Stages of Heat-Related Illness

Heat-related illness usually comes in stages. The signal of the first stage is heat cramps in muscles. These cramps can be very painful. If you are caring for a person who has heat cramps, have him or her stop activity and rest. If the person is fully awake and alert, have him or her drink small amounts of cool water or a commercial sports drink. Gently stretch the cramped muscle and hold the stretch for about 20 seconds, then gently massage the muscle. Repeat these steps if necessary. If the victim has no other signals of heat-related illness, the person may resume activity after the cramps stop.

The signals of the next, more serious stage of a heat-related illness (often called **heat exhaustion**) include--

- Cool, moist, pale skin (the skin may be red right after physical activity).
- Headache.
- Dizziness and weakness or exhaustion.
- Nausea.
- The skin may or may not feel hot.

The signals of the late stage of a heat-related illness (often called **heat stroke**) include--

- Vomiting.
- Decreased alertness level or complete loss of consciousness.
- High body temperature (sometimes as high as 105°F).
- Skin may still be moist or the victim may stop sweating and the skin may be red, hot and dry.
- Rapid, weak pulse.
- Rapid, shallow breathing.

**This late stage of a heat-related illness is life threatening.
Call University Police at 333-7816 or use the Emergency number 259-5555.**