

TO YOUR HEALTH

Carleton-Willard Village Out-Patient Clinic • 100 Old Billerica Rd., Bedford, MA 01730

Volume 18, Number 7

July 2013

HEAT ALERT

by Barbara Chenoweth, NP

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), extreme heat is a far greater risk for people than storms, tornadoes, hurricanes or floods. Even though the tragedies of these unpredictable events receive greater attention in the media, more people die from excessive heat. Every year, on average, 658 people die from extreme heat, more than tornadoes, hurricanes, floods and lightning combined, (*Press Release, June 6, 2013, CDC*).

A recent study released by the CDC found that 7,233 deaths occurred in the US from 1999 to 2009. An analysis of the 2012 data showed that the deaths are on the rise. In a two-week period in 2012, excessive heat exposure resulted in 32 deaths in four states, four times the typical average for those states for the same two-week period from 1999-2009.

Heat related deaths are entirely preventable, and as the CDC says, no one should die from the heat. While extreme heat affects everyone, the elderly, children, the poor or homeless, people who exercise outdoors and those with chronic medical problems have the highest risk. Being knowledgeable and prepared are key to preventing heat related illnesses and death.

Everyone should know the signs and symptoms of heat exhaustion and heat stroke. Sometimes the *first sign of a heat-related illness may be muscle cramping*. A person experiencing *heat exhaustion* may feel:

- Heavy sweating

- Weakness
- Cold, pale and clammy skin
- Fast, weak pulse
- Nausea or vomiting
- Fainting

The best treatment is to move to a cooler location, lie down and loosen your clothing, apply wet, cool cloths to as much of the body as possible, and sip water. If you have vomited or if the symptoms continue, seek medical attention.

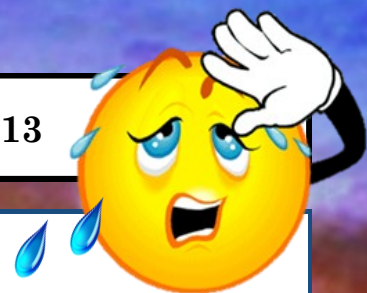
Or the other hand, *heat stroke* is a medical emergency and requires immediate medical attention. The signs and symptoms include:

- High body temperature (above 103 degrees)
- Hot, red, dry or moist skin
- Rapid, strong pulse
- Possible unconsciousness

With a *heat stroke*, *do not take fluids*, but do move to a cooler environment and try to reduce the body's temperature with cool cloths. Getting medical attention is the first priority.

Knowing the seriousness of extreme heat is essential so that steps can be taken to prevent heat-related illnesses. Looking back again to the statistics on heat-related deaths, 91% occurred in homes without air conditioning. At Carleton-Willard Village, all living areas are air conditioned so this should not be a problem. However, it is a big problem, because people often do not turn on their air conditioning! People over 65 years do not feel and respond to changes in temperature in the same way as younger people; they often are unaware of how the heat is affecting their body. They may not experience thirst. Medicines, such as diuretics, may increase the risk of





heat-related illnesses. Remember that across the nation, heat-related deaths are more common among adults over the age of 65.

The challenge for older people and those with chronic illnesses is to remember to take preventive measures even though their bodies are not giving any clues that they are hot or need more fluids. In fact, the more reliable indication of excessive heat is the outside temperature. Staying tuned to the outside temperature and then putting on the air conditioning and drinking extra fluids to compensate may be the best prevention.

Rather than relying on our internal sensations, when the temperature outside is high, take the following precautions:

- Drink more water than usual
- Don't wait to feel thirsty to drink more fluids
- Drink from two to four cups of water for every hour of exercise outside
- Avoid alcohol and fluids with high amounts of sugar
- Stay in air-conditioning as much as possible
- Do not rely on fans as a primary cooling device
- Avoid direct sunlight
- Wear loose, lightweight and light-colored clothing
- Take cool showers or baths
- Avoid using the stove or oven that will make your home hotter
- Check local news for extreme heat alerts

As much as we look forward to the warm sunny days of spring and summer, we now have more extreme hot weather than in the past. It isn't just a problem for the southern states. Be prepared, take precautions and enjoy the summer!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

AUGUST DRUG PICK-UP

The Bedford Police Department will be picking expired prescriptions and over-the-counter medications at the Clinic on Friday, August 9, 2013. Please drop off your expired medicines between 8:30am-12:30pm. We cannot accept expired medicines at any other time or on any other day.

CLINIC NEWS

The Clinic now offers an Audiology Walk-In Clinic every first and third Tuesday of the month from 11:00 am-12:00 pm for residents who need hearing aid batteries or have hearing aid questions. Questions that can only be answered by a hearing examination will require an appointment.

