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RISKAlert

July 2017

## Heat Warnings - Summer Programs



Summer heat is one of the leading causes of weather-related fatalities in the United States. Anyone exposed to extreme heat - including people working outdoors - is at risk for heat stress. In an educational setting, this also includes campers, athletes, as well as counselors, coaches and volunteers. Additionally, offsite trips often involve activities (such as hiking, kayaking, climbing or cycling) that present a higher exposure to heat. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) caution that anyone 65 years of age or older, are overweight, have heart disease or high blood pressure, or take medications are at greater risk of heat stress. As summer camps are in full swing, and football and soccer camps will be starting shortly in many parts of the country, a reminder about heat stress is in order. As expected for this time of year, the National Weather Service has posted Excessive Heat Warnings, Watches and Advisories for different parts of the country.

Limiting strenuous outdoor activities during periods of extreme heat is the simplest way to reduce the likelihood of a heat-related illness. The hottest time of the day is typically midafternoon (for example, around 3:00 pm) according to NOAA - the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration - and not at noon.

The National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) provides safety tips for athletes who play or practice when there are high temperatures. They are applicable to summer camps with recreational or athletic programs as well. They include the following recommendations:

- \* **Unrestricted access to water is critical.** Have water and sports drinks on hand.
- \* Keep beverages cold.
- \* Replacement of lost fluids is the key safeguard to prevent heat-related incidents. Hydrate before, during and after activity. An individual can lose up to a half-gallon in fluids during outdoor play in extreme temperatures.
- \* Remove unnecessary equipment - such as helmets and padding - when conditions become extreme.
- \* Use light colored, lightweight clothing that protects against the sun.
- \* If participants are not acclimatized to the weather, encourage a gradual adjustment to the heat. During the first week or so, shorter practices or activity time is in order to adapt.
- \* Follow a strict work-to-rest ratio, such as 10-minute breaks after 40 minutes of exercise.

Information about heat cramps, syncope, exhaustion and heat stroke are available from many sources, including the CDC (<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/heatstress/>), National Weather Service (<http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/heat/index.shtml>), and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) (<https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/heatillness/index.html>) The NATA's handout - Beat the Heat can be accessed at:

[http://www.nata.org/sites/default/files/Hydration\\_Heat\\_Illness\\_Handout.pdf](http://www.nata.org/sites/default/files/Hydration_Heat_Illness_Handout.pdf)

Additionally, having current medical forms for student-athletes and medical information for campers will help identify students and others with medical conditions that may put them at greater risk for harm.

In general, heat related illnesses are mostly caused by too little intake of water and profuse sweating. Sweating causes the body to lose water and if it is not replaced can have serious consequences. Educational institutions should make sure to have unrestricted access and availability of water for campers, athletes, students and staff to prevent heat related illnesses. Train staff as well as students on the signs and symptoms to help prevent heat related illnesses.

#### **Resources:**

##### **American Academy of Family Physicians**

<http://www.aafp.org/afp/2002/0601/p2307.html>

##### **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.**

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/heatstress/>

Gatorade Sports Science Institute. [www.gssiweb.com](http://www.gssiweb.com)

**National Athletic Trainers Association.** [www.nata.org](http://www.nata.org)

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<http://www.wrightspecialty.com>

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