

Heat wave especially dangerous for kids

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(Medical Xpress) -- Extreme heat continues to plague the nation with many areas seeing record temperatures. Though everyone needs to take precautions when it comes to dangerous heat, it's especially important to watch your kids. Children are at a greater risk than adults of sustaining heat injuries.

“[Kids](#)’ bodies don’t acclimate to the heat as well as adults. They don’t sweat as effectively. They absorb more heat since they have smaller bodies and a higher ratio of surface area to body mass,” said Jerold Stirling, chair of the department of pediatrics at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine and a pediatrician at Loyola University Health System.

According to Stirling, one of the greatest dangers is leaving a child in a car unattended on a hot day.

“No matter the child’s age, this can be dangerous or even deadly. Even if it’s for a short period of time and you leave the car windows down, it’s dangerous. Inside the car can be several degrees hotter than outside and places a child at greater risk for heat stroke or heat exhaustion,” Stirling said.

No matter where a child is or their age, according to Stirling, supervision and parental intervention is crucial when the temperatures reach these extremes.

“Kids are supposed to be out having fun. They can get wrapped up in

what they are doing and forget to take breaks. They're also not as tuned in to their body's cues," Stirling said.

He suggests parents encourage their kids to stay active but to make sure they're hydrated before going outside and also to take frequent water and cooling-off breaks.

"Parents need to encourage their kids to take breaks every so often by coming inside or resting in the shade. For every 20 minutes of vigorous exercise, make sure your child is drinking 8 ounces of water," Stirling said.

Even when in the swimming pool, Stirling said hydration breaks are important.

"The cold pool water will help keep your body cool, but it doesn't replace the fluids that have been lost due to the heat. Make sure your kids are getting out of the pool to drink water and add an extra layer of sunscreen on at the same time," Stirling said.

He said that sports drinks are only needed if a child is involved in vigorous exercise for more than an hour.

"Be careful what your child drinks to rehydrate. Usually, water is the best option. Be sure to stay away from soda that contains the three Cs: carbonation, caffeine and calories. This is not a good combination for hydration," Stirling said.

Though signs of heat exhaustion differ depending on age, the most common are:

- Headaches

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Muscle cramps
- Crankiness
- Fatigue
- Thirst/dry mouth

For infants and young children he suggests monitoring urine output. If your child's urine is a dark yellow color, he or she more than likely is dehydrated.

“Another common concern for parents of infants is a skin rash called prickly heat. This happens when pores get blocked by perspiration on the skin and cause an uncomfortable rash. Though it looks bad, the best thing to do is keep the baby's skin dry so the perspiration can evaporate more easily and make sure to keep the baby in light-weight clothing,” Stirling said.

Light-weight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing helps to keep kids of all ages cooler on hot summer days, according to Stirling.

“While helping with a high school football team that trained in black uniforms in August, I had to place three IVs in players. What clothes your kids wear really do make a difference,” Stirling said.

If you do suspect a heat-related illness:

- Get them out of the sun and into a shaded area
- Ensure they are drinking cold water
- Place cool towels on the skin
- They should sit in a chair with legs elevated over the heart
- If needed, provide a sports drink

- If the symptoms continue, call 911 and seek medical attention

“Heat stroke is a medical emergency. A person’s body temperature can rise to 104 degrees. If the child has an altered level of consciousness, this is a sign he or she is suffering from heat stroke. Get medical help immediately,” Stirling said.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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