

It's hot outside: How to stay safe when thermometers rise

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(HealthDay)—As much of the United States continues to swelter

through 90-plus temperatures and high humidity, one emergency physician is offering advice on keeping safe.

First, Dr. Robert Glatter said, it's important to know that anyone can be a victim of [heat](#) stroke, but some people are at particular risk.

"Heat stroke develops when the body is unable to effectively sweat to cool itself down," said Glatter, an emergency physician at Lenox Hill Hospital, in New York City. "As core temperatures rapidly elevate, the skin becomes dry and your heart rate begins to elevate."

When body temperature rises, damage to the brain and other organs can occur unless help comes quickly.

The very old and the very young are at highest risk, Glatter said.

"Children are at higher risk for [hyperthermia](#) and consequently heat stroke due to their reduced ability to thermoregulate their body temperatures," he explained.

Kids have a "higher ratio of surface area to body mass, which reduces their ability to cool their bodies efficiently and effectively," Glatter said.

Too often, kids don't hydrate themselves as they should, so parents need to be sure youngsters drink plenty of water when temperatures soar.

"It's important to drink plenty of cool fluids in the heat and even stay 'ahead' of your thirst," Glatter said. "Water is preferable, but low-sugar sports drinks are recommended if you are working in the heat or exercising for more than one hour."

Two types of drinks—alcohol and [sugary soft drinks](#)—won't help in the heat and may even harm, dehydrating you further.

Elderly people also need to take special care, especially when air conditioning isn't available, Glatter said.

Check on seniors to see how they are feeling, he advised. "Make sure, if possible, that they have access to [air conditioning](#) and plenty of cool fluids. It's also vital to have a 'heat response' plan to help reduce the chances for heat stroke developing in the first place," he said.

Compared to younger adults, seniors have a reduced ability to sweat and cool their bodies, making them particularly vulnerable in heat waves, Glatter noted.

"They also may be taking medications to treat blood pressure [such as diuretics] that can reduce their ability to sweat effectively," he said. Other drugs that make heat stroke more likely are antihistamines, antidepressants, antipsychotics and benzodiazepines.

"Hypertension, [coronary artery disease](#) and kidney disease—common in the senior population—all elevate the risk for developing heat stroke, due to reduced cardiac reserve and plasticity of blood vessels," Glatter said. "These are major risk factors for heat stroke."

How to tell if you or a loved one is suffering heat stroke?

"Confusion is a common presenting symptom of patients who develop heat stroke, and this can even mimic a stroke," Glatter said.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, other signs include a body temperature above 103 degrees Fahrenheit; red, hot and dry skin with little or no sweating; a rapid, strong pulse; throbbing headache; dizziness; nausea; and loss of consciousness.

Remember, [heat stroke](#) is "a medical emergency, and it's vital to seek

treatment immediately in the emergency department by calling 911," Glatter said. "A patient requires rapid cooling and attention to their airway and blood volume status to effectively resuscitate them."

More information: Find out more about heat stroke at the [U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

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