

Our Vision: Healthy People in Healthy Communities
Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster Counties

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Recommendations for staying cool in extreme heat conditions

Hastings, Neb – High temperatures and high humidity that we experience in the summer months can not only be miserable, but can also cause a range of heat-related illnesses. “When we have extreme heat conditions, we need to take precautions against sunburn, heat exhaustion, heat stroke and other heat-related illnesses,” advises Michele Bever, executive director for the South Heartland District Health Department.

Experts say to pay attention to the [heat index](#), which is what the temperature feels like to our bodies when the relative humidity is combined with the air temperature. Caution levels are 80°F - 90°F, Extreme Caution levels are 90°F - 103°F, Danger levels are 103°F - 124°F, and Extreme Danger levels are 125°F or higher.

“During extreme heat conditions, we recommend you find a ‘cool place’ for relief from the heat,” Bever said. Air-conditioned public spaces can meet these temporary needs. In addition, the health department maintains lists of designated cooling sites in Adams, Clay, Nuckolls and Webster counties, as well as organizations that can provide fans to individuals in need.

Excessive heat exposure can cause illness and even death, but heat-related illnesses, including heat exhaustion and heat stroke are preventable, if people take precautions and properly cool themselves.

Take these steps to prevent heat-related illness:

- Drink plenty water to keep your body hydrated. Stay away from alcoholic and high sugar drinks, which can actually increase your body’s fluid loss.
- Wear appropriate clothing including loose-fitting, lightweight, light-colored clothing.
- Apply sunscreen of SPF 30 or higher (sunburn interferes with your body’s ability to cool itself).
- Schedule outdoor activities carefully to limit activity during the hottest part of the day.
- Pace yourself, especially if you are not used to working or exercising outside. If exertion in the heat makes your heart pound and leaves you gasping for breath, STOP all activity, get into a cool place (at least into the shade) and rest. Watch for symptoms of light-headedness, confusion, or feeling weak or faint.
- Use a Buddy System when working or playing in the heat to monitor your co-worker’s or teammate’s condition and for them to do the same for you. Heat related illness can cause a person to become confused or lose consciousness.
- Monitor those at high risk. If you know someone who is 65 years of age or older, check on them at least twice a day watching for signs of heat exhaustion or heat stroke. Others

at risk of heat-related illness include infants and young children, people who are overweight, people who over-exert during work or exercise, people with chronic conditions (such as those with heart disease, high blood pressure, asthma or mental illness), or who take certain medications such as antidepressants or tranquilizers.

- Don't leave children or pets in parked cars. Even with the windows cracked open, the temperature inside a car can rise almost 20 degrees in the first 10 minutes putting anyone inside at risk for serious heat-related illness or even death.
- Protect your pets. Be sure your pets have access to plenty of water and shady places to go when outdoors. Test sidewalks with your hand. If it's too hot for your hand, it's probably too hot for your pet. Avoid exercising with your pet outside on extremely hot days.

Bever said heat stroke is considered a medical emergency. “If a person’s body temperature exceeds 102 degrees F, assist them to cool in the shade or in an air-conditioned building and seek emergency medical assistance,” she said.

For more information visit the [National Weather Service](http://www.weather.gov) website (www.weather.gov) and the CDC’s website http://emergency.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/heat_guide.asp. For local cooling center locations, contact SHDHD office at 1-877-238-7595.

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