



HARFORD COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

120 South Hays Street

PO Box 797

Bel Air, Maryland 21014-0797

Susan C. Kelly, R.S.
Health Officer

NEWS RELEASE 10:19

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: June 23, 2010

Contacts: Bill Wiseman, Public Information Officer, 410-612-1781

CLIMBING TEMPERATURES RAISE CONCERNS OVER HEAT ILLNESS

Bel Air, MD – June 23, 2010 – If the first week of summer, 2010 is any indication, Harford County residents should prepare for a few months of soaring temperatures and humidity, giving rise to concerns about heat-related illness. With steadily climbing temperatures and a rising heat index, Health Officer Susan Kelly reminds individuals of all ages to be cautious when vigorously working or playing outdoors or during prolonged exposure to hot and humid weather conditions.

Ms. Kelly states, "Prolonged heat exposure can result in recreational as well as occupational illnesses and injuries. Persons who work or recreate outside in direct exposure to the sun, or indoors in excessive heat for any extended period of time must be particularly mindful of the risks and be exceptionally careful." She also encourages everyone to remember to pay attention to family members, co-workers, friends, and neighbors. "Make sure they are taking the necessary precautions, especially if they are young, elderly, or ill."

Heat illness takes many forms, including heat fatigue, heat syncope (sudden dizziness after exercising in the heat), heat cramps, heat exhaustion or the most serious, heat stroke. Heat stroke, is an advanced form of heat stress that occurs when the body is overwhelmed by heat and unable to control its temperature. Someone with a body temperature above 104 degrees is likely suffering from heat stroke and may have symptoms of confusion, combativeness, strong rapid pulse, lack of sweating, dry flushed skin, faintness, staggering, possible delirium or coma. Seek immediate medical attention for a person with any of these symptoms, especially an older adult.

Basic strategies are key to preventing heat illness and are focused on limiting exposure to excessive heat, limiting activity, and staying hydrated by drinking more non-caffeinated, non-alcoholic fluids than usual.

The risk for heat illness is a combination of the outside temperature along with the general health and lifestyle of the individual. Health-related factors that may increase risk include:

- The inability to perspire, caused by medications such as diuretics, sedatives, tranquilizers and certain heart and blood pressure drugs
- Taking several drugs for various conditions. It is important, however, to continue to take prescribed medication and discuss possible problems with a physician.
- Being substantially overweight or underweight
- Drinking alcoholic beverages
- Being dehydrated
- Age-related changes to the skin such as poor blood circulation and inefficient sweat glands
- Heart, lung and kidney diseases, as well as any illness that causes general weakness or fever
- High blood pressure or other conditions that require changes in diet. For example, people on salt-restricted diets may be at an increased risk. However, salt pills should not be used without first consulting a doctor.

Lifestyle factors that also can increase risk include extremely hot living accommodations, lack of transportation, overdressing, visiting overcrowded places and not understanding how to respond to changing weather conditions. Individuals at special risk should stay indoors on particularly hot and humid days, especially when there is an air pollution alert in effect. People without fans or air conditioners should go to places such as shopping malls, movie theaters, libraries or cooling centers.

Several cooling centers are accessible at locations throughout Harford County. The collaborative decision by the County's Emergency Operations Center and the County Health Officer to open these centers is based on National Weather Service heat index information. In the event of these openings, communities are provided timely notification by means of public service announcements on radio, television and in print media.

For more information on heat-related illness, visit the National Centers for Disease Control website at www.cdc.gov or call the Harford County Health Department at 410-612-1781. For a free copy of the NIA's Age Page on hyperthermia in English or in Spanish, contact the NIA Information Center at 1-800-222-2225 or go to <http://www.niapublications.org/agepages/hyperther.asp> or www.niapublications.org/agepages/hyperther-sp.asp for the Spanish-language version.

#