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Don't Get Burned by Heat Stroke

Potentially deadly illness can usually be prevented, experts advise

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HealthDay

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WEDNESDAY, July 4 (HealthDay News) -- Staying cool on hot summer days isn't just comfortable, it could save your life, according to the Pennsylvania Medical Society.

Heat stroke -- injury to internal organs caused by an excessively high body temperature -- is a serious and potentially deadly illness that can usually be prevented. Even so, it still happens all too frequently, experts say.

Many people recall the August 2001 death of Minnesota Viking's football player Korey Stringer. He died after developing multi-organ system failure on a hot day. Athletes are particularly vulnerable to heat stroke -- especially football players, who wear body-covering uniforms and practice in the hottest temperatures -- but it can affect anyone.

Heat stroke can occur when you are in an extremely hot environment for a long period of time. It also happens when people overexert themselves on very hot days.

According to the Pennsylvania Medical Society, you should be alert to heat stroke on days when the relative humidity is at least 70 percent and temperatures are 95 degrees Fahrenheit and higher.

Other heat-related afflictions that may be a sign of looming heat stroke include heat cramps and heat exhaustion, which is characterized by pale, moist skin; headache; dizziness; nausea; increased heart rate; low blood pressure; elevated temperature and profuse sweating.

The symptoms of heat stroke are more severe than those of heat exhaustion and may include:

- Initial profuse sweating.
- Hot, dry red skin.
- High fever.
- Vomiting.
- Confusion.
- Seizures during cooling.
- Unconsciousness.
- Sometimes lack of sweating, though athletes may perspire.
- High body temperature (often 105 degrees or higher).

Anyone experiencing these symptoms should immediately seek emergency medical help.

Steps you can take to keep cool despite hot temperatures include:

- Avoid overexertion.
- Drink a quart of fluids an hour.

- Wear loose, light-colored clothing made of light fabrics.
- Wear a hat and sunblock.
- Stay in the shade or indoors when possible.
- Open windows and use fans and/or air conditioning; if you don't have air conditioning, go to a public place that does (a mall, library or movie theater).
- Avoid dehydrating beverages such as caffeine and alcohol.

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