



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Guard against heat-related problems associated with cleanup activities

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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As people are working long days to clean up from the recent tornadoes, the Alabama Department of Public Health cautions the public about the risks of dehydration, sunburn and heat-related illnesses.

Dehydration

Drink plenty of fluids, and do not wait until you are thirsty to drink. Do not drink liquids that contain alcohol or large amounts of sugar. Also avoid very cold drinks, because they can cause stomach cramps.

Replace salt and minerals which your body needs. If you must work outside, drink two to four glasses of cool, non-alcoholic fluids each hour. A sports beverage can replace the salt and minerals you lose in sweat. However, if you are on a low-salt diet, talk with your doctor before drinking a sports beverage or taking salt tablets.

Sunburn

If you are outdoors, protect yourself from the sun by wearing a wide-brimmed hat (which also keeps you cooler) along with sunglasses. Wear sunscreen that says "broad spectrum" or "UVA/UVB protection" and apply it 30 minutes before going out. Continue to reapply it according to the package directions.

Heat-related Illnesses

Pace yourself if you are not accustomed to working or exercising in a hot environment. Work during the cooler hours of the day, when possible. Start slowly and pick up the pace gradually. If exertion in the heat makes your heart pound and leaves you gasping for breath, STOP all activity. Get into a cool area or at least into the shade and rest, especially if you become lightheaded, confused, weak or faint.

Elderly people (65 and older), infants and children, and people with chronic medical conditions (heart problems, poor circulation, diabetes, a previous stroke or obesity) are more prone to heat stress. People using medications for high blood pressure, nervousness or depression are also at higher risk.

Heat-related illnesses occur when the body's temperature control system is overloaded. Be alert to the warnings that may signal help is needed.

Heat stroke, sometimes called sunstroke, is the most serious heat-related illness. It occurs when the body becomes unable to control its temperature. The body's temperature rises rapidly, the sweating mechanism fails, and the body is unable to cool down. Body temperature may rise to 106 degrees F or higher within 10 to 15 minutes. Heat stroke can cause death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not provided.

Warning signs of heat stroke vary, but include the following:

- An extremely high body temperature (above 103 degrees F)
- Red, hot and dry skin (no sweating)
- Rapid, strong pulse
- Throbbing headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Confusion
- Unconsciousness

Seek emergency medical help as soon as possible if you see any of these signs. Have someone call for immediate assistance while you begin cooling the victim in a shady area. If emergency medical personnel are delayed, call a hospital emergency room for further instructions.

For more information, visit www.adph.org.

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