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## **Health and Safety Alert For Caregivers of Individuals with Developmental Disabilities**

### **WARM WEATHER DANGERS**



The purpose of this alert is to make caregivers aware that it is especially important to be mindful of the individuals in their care when the weather is warm. Overexposure to the sun and heat can result in conditions ranging from a simple sunburn that causes moderate pain, to sun or heat stroke that can lead to delirium, coma and even death if the symptoms are not recognized and quickly addressed. The elderly, the very young, and individuals with chronic illnesses are especially at risk, as are individuals who take certain medications that are known to heighten sensitivity to the heat and sun.

### **Dangers from overexposure to the sun and heat**

#### **Sunburn**

Sunburn is an indication of damage to the skin caused by overexposure to the sun. The first indication of sunburn is slight reddening of the skin, accompanied by varying degrees of pain. This can result from as little as 15 minute in the sun. More intense exposure can lead to itching, peeling skin, rash, nausea and fever. The sunburn can become warm to the touch as blood concentrates during the healing process. In the most severe cases, sunburn can be a first or second degree burn and require immediate medical attention.

Frequent exposure of the skin to the sun over a period of time can lead to skin cancer. A dermatologist should be consulted if a skin lesion appears suddenly, changes color or becomes larger than ¼ inch, or if a skin lesion has an asymmetrical appearance and is darker around the edges than at the center. Any of these could be an indication of skin cancer.

**Individuals with fair skin, blue eyes, and red or blonde hair are at increased risk of sunburn, especially if their skin is already compromised, or if they are taking certain types of medications such as anti-psychotics, anti-depressants, and anti-Parkinson drugs.**

### Dehydration

Overexposure to the heat and sun can lead to dehydration, which is the loss of body fluids and electrolytes due to profuse sweating and an inadequate intake of water. Signs of dehydration include:

- Headaches
- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Fainting
- Blurred vision
- Confusion
- Urine output decreases and becomes concentrated and appears dark
- Sunken eyes
- Wrinkled or saggy skin – elasticity decreases
- Extreme dryness in the mouth
- Fever or temperature over 102 degrees
- Severe pain or blistering of skin
- Heat exhaustion, which can cause flulike symptoms plus a throbbing headache, cool skin, chills and a weak pulse.

**IF DEHYDRATION IS SUSPECTED, REHYDRATION IS THE KEY TO PREVENTING FURTHER COMPLICATIONS. REMEMBER TO DRINK LOTS OF FLUIDS AND SEEK MEDICAL TREATMENT!**



## Sun Stroke or Heat Stroke

Sun/heat stroke is the consequence of a series of events that begin with dehydration. As the body's core temperature rises, dehydration turns to heat exhaustion. If the situation is not rectified quickly, heat stroke can result as the body's organs shut down due to the lack of vital fluids and nutrients. Heat stroke can lead to delirium, coma, and eventually death!



**IF SUN/HEAT STROKE IS  
SUSPECTED,  
GET EMERGENCY MEDICAL  
ATTENTION  
IMMEDIATELY!**



### **Risk Factors for Heat Related Illnesses**

- Being elderly, very young or chronically ill
  - Chronic medical conditions include, but are not limited to:
    - cardiac (heart) disease
    - hypertension (high blood pressure)
    - obesity
    - diabetes
    - kidney and
    - lung disease
- Poor physical conditioning
- High environmental temperature and humidity
- Poor ventilation or cooling in buildings
- Poor fluid intake
- Alcohol use (increases fluid loss)
- Medications that inhibit perspiration or increase fluid loss including:
  - a. Those used to treat movement disorders (anti-Parkinson drugs, including Cogentin)
  - b. Those used to treat allergies (antihistamines such as Benadryl).
  - c. Diuretics (water pills) such as Lasix (furosimide), bumetanide, hydrochlorothiazide.
  - d. Those used to treat psychiatric conditions including, but not limited to:
    - »Clozaril (clozapine)
    - »Compazine (prochlorperazine)
    - »Elavil, Limbitrol, Triavil (amitriptyline)
    - »Haldol (haloperidol)
    - »Loxitane (loxapine)
    - »Phenergan (promethazine)
    - »Wellbutrin (bupropion)
    - »Zyrex (olanzapine)

**Always check with a doctor for specific guidance.**

## Proactive Measures to Avoid Heat Related Illness

Caregivers should be aware of individuals in their care who have risk factors for heat related illness and observe them at regular intervals. **Caregivers should never leave any individual in a parked vehicle with the windows closed for any length of time on a hot day.** All individuals, but especially those with risk factors for heat related illnesses, should:

- Avoid the sun between 10 AM and 4 PM
- Always drink at least 8 glasses of water a day, and more in hot weather (unless on fluid restriction, when a doctor should be consulted)
- Avoid caffeinated beverages and alcohol, which increase fluid loss
- Seek open, shaded areas outdoors and use fans and air conditioning indoors
- If there is no air conditioning:
  - At night, open windows to allow for cross ventilation of cooler outdoor air
  - During the day, try to spend time in a building that is air conditioned, such as a shopping mall or public library
  - At home, keep blinds drawn, windows open for cross ventilation, and move to cooler rooms
- Take frequent breaks when participating in physical activities outdoors
- Wear light-colored loose-fitting clothing (dark colors absorb heat, loose clothing allows air to circulate and cool the body)
- Eat regular, light meals
- Take cool showers or baths
- Use sun block with a sun protection factor (SPF) whenever out-of-doors, and consult a doctor to learn if a prescription is required for the use of sun screen, or if a lip balm with sun screen should be used. The doctor will advise as to what the SPF should be and how often it should be applied.
- Wear a hat, especially if hair is thin on top!
- Wear sunglasses that absorb at least 90% UV rays (check the label on the sunglasses)
- Come in out of the sun when the skin first begins to turn pink

### DISCLAIMER

This material is being provided strictly to alert DDD staff and providers, families, individuals and the general public about the dangers of exposure to heat and sun. At no time is this alert to substitute for training nor is it to suffice as training. Staff who have been trained in how to address the issue of sunburn and dehydration still are required to implement their training.