

Q & A for Parents: Guidelines for Parents and Caretakers during High Heat Index Periods

Playing outdoors is important to all children's growth and development, but it is important to remember that **extreme heat can make a child very sick, very quickly.**

Overall, we are facing hotter temperatures for longer periods of time. According to the CDC, those most at-risk for heat illness include "infants, children, pregnant women, the elderly, and those with certain health conditions." **The National Weather Service says that a heat index at or above 90 degrees Fahrenheit (F) poses a significant health risk.**

Please review the following information to keep your children safe during periods of extreme temperatures and humidity.

Q: What is considered extreme heat?

A: In most of the United States, extreme heat 2-3 days of high heat and humidity with temperatures above 90 degrees Fahrenheit.

Q: How can very high temperatures and humidity affect my child?

A: Children can become sick very quickly in high temperatures which can result in any one of the following:

- Dehydration
- Heat exhaustion
- Heat cramps
- Heat stroke

Q: What is the difference between heat exhaustion and heat stroke?

A: Before a child has a heat stroke he may show signs of a milder heat illness such as **heat cramps or exhaustion.** This usually happens when a child has been playing or exercising in the heat and becomes dehydrated (thirsty). Signs of heat exhaustion may include:

- A body temperature above 104 degrees F
- Skin that is cool and clammy to the touch
- Goose bumps
- Weakness or dizziness
- Increased sweat
- Increased thirst
- Muscle cramps
- Headache
- Nausea or vomiting

Q: How do I know if my child is having a heat stroke?

A: A heat stroke can develop from heat exhaustion so it is important to know the differences. Heat stroke is the most serious and is considered a medical emergency, You should find emergency medical treatment immediately if you think your child is having a heat stroke.

Signs of heat stroke may include several of the above symptoms in addition to the following:

- A rapid increase in body temperature
- Absence of sweating
- Confusion or disorientation
- Flushed, hot, dry skin
- Rapid heartbeat
- Severe headache
- Seizures
- Weakness or dizziness
- Nausea, vomiting or diarrhea

Q: How do I protect my child from heat illness:

A: There are several actions you can take to protect your child during extreme heat:

- Plan outdoor activities during the **cooler part of the day, such as in the morning or early evening;**
- **Find as much shade as possible** when playing outdoors;
- Make sure your child is hydrated and take **frequent water breaks;**
- Choose **clothing that is loose, light-colored,** moisture wicking (not heavy cotton), or SPF protective; and
- Even if swimming, time in the water should be watched.

Q: How do I protect my baby and younger children who can't tell me when they are too hot?

A: According to the AAP, you should not take a baby and younger children outside for long periods of time if the heat index is above 90 degrees F because they can overheat quickly. The following is also advised:

- Take a break from the heat every 15-30 minutes;
- If the heat is above 75-80 degrees F, you should **find shade when outside;**
- Dress your baby in **light-weight cotton or linen that is light in color.** Avoid synthetic fabrics like polyester or nylon;
- Offer breastmilk or formula to **keep your baby hydrated. Older babies and toddlers should drink water to stay hydrated;**
- **Rest time or a nap following outdoor play is suggested.** Babies and younger children tire more easily in the heat; and
- Choose the **coolest parts of the day** to be outdoors with your baby.

As always, if you have any questions about the state of your child's health, contact your pediatrician for help.

Sources:

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/Protecting-Children-from-Extreme-Heat-Information-for-Parents.aspx>

<https://www.childrens.com/health-wellness/keeping-your-baby-safe-and-cool-in-summer>

<https://www.weather.gov>

