

Summer is a time for enjoying the outdoors with family and friends. But it's important to keep in mind that hot weather can be dangerous if proper precautions aren't taken.

According to the National Weather Service, heat is one of the leading causes of weather-related fatalities each year in the United States, resulting in hundreds of deaths. That's why it's important to take precautionary measures and use good judgment to help protect you and your family for a safe, happy summer.

Stay cool at home

- Check air conditioning. Make sure it is properly working and insulated. Installing weather stripping on doors and windowsills as part of your summer home maintenance will help keep cool air in and hot air out.
- Cover windows. Use drapes, shades, awnings, or louvers for any windows that receive morning or afternoon sun. This can reduce the heat entering your home by up to 80 percent.
- Use fans strategically. Ceiling fans should run counter-clockwise to force room air down and make you feel cooler. Water from a spray bottle can help cool you down dramatically—as it evaporates off your skin, your body sheds heat.
- Cook with small appliances. Slow cookers and tabletop grills are good options over traditional ovens and stovetops to minimize heat.

Eating, drinking, and scheduling exercise

- Drink plenty of water and other fluids. Don't wait to rehydrate until you're thirsty. Adults should drink eight 8-ounce glasses of water each day and may need more on hot and humid days.
- Avoid alcohol, caffeine, and carbonated drinks. These can lead to dehydration and increase the effects of heat illness.
- Eat meals that are well-balanced and light. Avoid high-protein foods, which increase metabolic heat and can add to water loss.
- Reschedule exercise. Avoid working out during the hottest part of the day. Check the weather forecast; if there's a heat advisory you may want to move your workout indoors.

Beware of heat-related illness

- Know the warning signs of heat exhaustion. Watch for breathing that is shallow and fast, headaches, dry mouth, pale or clammy skin, muscle cramps, tiredness, disorientation, sweating, passing out, nausea, and vomiting. Seek immediate medical attention.
- Know the warning signs of heat stroke. Symptoms include dizziness, a high body temperature (above 103°F), red, hot, and dry skin (no sweating), unconsciousness, nausea, confusion, rapid, strong pulse, and throbbing headache. Seek immediate medical attention.
- Be informed. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more information on heat-related illnesses and first aid.

Monitor yourself and others

- Check regularly on high-risk people. Keep an eye out for infants and young children, people aged 65 or older, the mentally or physically ill, the overweight, and those who overexert during work or exercise. They are especially vulnerable in extreme heat.

- Never leave a person or a pet in a parked car. They can succumb to heat exposure very quickly. Also be careful when entering a car in hot weather. Temperatures inside can reach 140°F to 190°F within 30 minutes on a hot, sunny day.
- Animals need shade and water. Pets can dehydrate quickly, so make sure they have plenty of fresh, clean water and a shady place to get out of the sun. Moderate their exercise and keep them indoors when it's extremely hot.
- Stay in cool areas. The best place to be is inside with air conditioning. If you don't have air conditioning at home, many public places, such as libraries, shopping malls and movie theatres, are air-conditioned.

Don't be afraid to get out and enjoy the summer sunshine with your friends and family. Just be sure to be prepared, use common sense, and know when it's time to take a rest.