

Preventing Heat Related Illnesses in Children



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There are three types of heat related illnesses:

1. Heat Stress - Occurs when the body cannot cool itself enough to maintain a healthy temperature. Signs of heat stress in children are very few wet nappies in 24 hours, crying without any tears, having a dry mouth, the fontanelle (soft spot in the skull) looking pushed in, eyes looking sunken, a fretful baby who is hot and dry to touch, a child who is listless or lethargic and profusely sweating. It is essential to replace lost fluids by offering drinks of water and taking action to cool down the child's body.

2. Heat Exhaustion - Fatigue, dizziness, headache and nausea are common signs of heat exhaustion. These symptoms are followed by cold, pale and clammy skin, with increased breathing and pulse rates. Stomach and leg cramps may also occur. Replace lost fluids by offering drinks of water. Use first aid to cool the child. **Seek medical aid if recovery is not prompt.**

3. Heat Stroke - Signs of Heat Stroke include high body temperature, red-hot dry skin, loss of consciousness, a full bounding pulse and rapid shallow noisy breathing. Treat the child in a similar way to a child suffering from heat exhaustion (see above). **Seek medical attention as a matter of urgency.**

In hot weather, it can be very easy for children to suffer from heat exhaustion, or worse still, heat stroke. Too much activity in the sun, not enough of the right liquids, leaving children in hot cars and unsuitable clothing put your child at risk.

Important Facts

- 55 to 60% of the body's weight is water
- A healthy body temperature is around 37°
- In hot environments, heat is lost through the skin via evaporation of perspiration

Children cannot regulate their body temperature as well as adults for the following reasons:

- It is hard for babies to maintain fluids
- Children generate more heat because they have a higher metabolic rate
- Children do not perspire as much as adults. Perspiration (sweating) works to cool the body through increased evaporation of fluids.

A child can lose fluids and become dehydrated by :

- Exposure to the sun or being sunburnt
- High temperatures and high humidity
- Being very active
- Consuming drinks that contain caffeine (that is in many soft drinks)

Excessive heat leads to dehydration (loss of water) which can impair body function, cause heat exhaustion and life threatening heat stroke.

Infants are at a higher risk than adults.

For general medical enquiries call Health Direct
1800 022 222

In an emergency call
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child safety is no accident



Fluids and Food

- Since children do not always recognise their thirst, carers are encouraged to offer them a drink of water frequently – before, during and after play.
- An indicator that a baby is getting enough fluids is if it has six to eight pale wet nappies in a 24 hour period.
- Provide frequent, smaller portions of food throughout the day.
- Give your child food items that have been well-chilled.

Kids in Cars

Leaving children unattended in the car, even for a short time, can be fatal. NEVER leave children unattended in the car.

- If you have to leave the car, even to run a quick errand, take your child with you.
- Provide plenty of cool water or fluids regularly during the journey.
- Dress children to promote airflow around their body. Have them wear lightweight fabric and dress them comfortably.
- When planning long journeys, consider travelling in the cooler hours of the day.

Further information:

Refer to *Kids in Cars* brochure available to download from kidsafensw.org

Visit:

Kids Health at the Children's Hospital at Westmead
kidshealth.schn.health.nsw.gov.au

The Cancer Council NSW
cancercouncil.com.au



How to Keep Your Child Cool

Environment

Try using a fan with a wet sheet in front of the infant or with a fine mist from a spray bottle of cool water. Using a fan by itself may not cool the environment adequately. Make sure the child cannot touch the fan, be cut with the blade, or be electrocuted.

Keep sheets cool by placing them in a plastic bag in the refrigerator for use at sleep time.

Consider relocating your child to the coolest room in the house.

Skin contact can be quite uncomfortable for a baby at feed times. Try using a towel, sheet or nappy between yourself and the baby.

Some people find they can keep a baby cool by using a sheepskin which allows air to flow freely through the natural wool fibres.

Clothing

Dress children in closely woven, loose-fitting, comfortable clothes.

Wear a hat when outside, preferably a floppy hat with a wide-brim, or a 'foreign legion' style cap with flaps, to protect the face, neck and ears.

Reduce Exercise

Taking occasional breaks from outdoor activities should help minimise the effects of heat and humidity during extreme heat.

Medication

Some medications are affected by exposure to heat and sunlight causing side effects when taken. Always read the medication labels on recommendations for storing.

Babies Under 6 Months

Keep babies out of the direct sunlight especially between the hours of 10am and 3pm.

Always keep an infant's head covered with a hat when outdoors.

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