Excessive Heat Events

Extreme Heat Preparedness Plan

When daytime temperatures are expected to reach and/or exceed 97°F, the heat index can top 105°F or higher for many parts of the Commonwealth. Last year in Virginia, the Chief Medical Examiner reported 10 deaths due to the heat alone. There were 5 deaths in both 2014 and 2013, and 12 in 2012.

The following action plan is intended to reduce the risk of injury or death among the public at large in those areas where an excessive heat event is expected. It is NOT intended to address comfort. Evidence suggests that even a few hours in an air-conditioned environment reduces the danger of heat-related illness. During Heat Advisories, fans may not be useful and may increase risk if not used properly.

Action Steps:

2. Increase awareness of available public assistance through the Cooling Assistance Program.
3. Increase awareness of who is at risk for death or injury due to heat. The individuals most at risk are small children, the elderly and impaired or immobilized persons NOT in an air-conditioned environment.
4. Work closely with your VDH Regional Public Information Officers (PIOs), your district PIO and your jurisdictional PIOs as well as the media to disseminate timely and important information on reducing heat exposure, symptoms, treatment, etc. Recommend that those involved in outdoor activities or planning events reschedule these activities/events. If it is not feasible to reschedule, advise them to perform their activity or hold their event around the heat. (That is, if they must be outside, go out before noon or at night when it is cooler.)
5. Remind again and again to “check your neighbor.” The people most at risk are isolated individuals who are small children, elderly, impaired or immobile, especially if they are not in an air-conditioned environment. If you know someone in this situation, check on them to see how they are doing. If there are problems, they may seek assistance through Social Services.
6. Assist with Cooling Center identification and set up in coordination with Social Services (the lead agency for this effort)
7. In times of excessive heat, “cooling stations” may be established. Cooling stations are only for individuals at high risk, and not for the general public’s comfort. People should not proceed directly to an established cooling center. Individuals at risk should call local Social Services to be referred to a cooling center.
8. Temporary transport of an at-risk individual to a cooling station is an emergency. Social Services will work directly with Essex County EMS and available private providers to transport immobile high-risk persons to these centers. Staff cars may be used for transport unless individuals are completely device dependent.
9. Persons at risk who are mobile or those seeking comfort are advised to make use of malls, libraries and government buildings during the day to reduce their risk.
10. Children, disabled adults and pets should not be left in vehicles for any period of time.