

As heat waves continue, experts urge steps to stay safe

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As a weekend heat wave that put more than 15 million Americans in the Northern and Central Plains on alert slowly moves east, the nation's emergency doctors have advice to keep you safe.

"Overexposure to the sun or [heat](#) can turn into an emergency faster than most people expect," said Dr. Gillian Schmitz, president of the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP). By Tuesday, the heat dome is expected to shift to the Great Lakes and the Ohio and Tennessee Valleys, and then into the southeast by Wednesday, [The New York Times](#) reported.

Schmitz said Americans can enjoy the summer and avoid the [emergency department](#) by taking precautions against [heat-related illness](#) and knowing the signs of an emergency.

It's important to monitor how much time you're spending in the sun, especially for [older adults](#) and children, she said, and to drink plenty of water.

Wear sunscreen to protect your skin, and sunglasses to help keep your eyes safe. Wear loose-fitting clothing.

Consider limiting exercise and strenuous physical activity to the morning or evening hours when it isn't as hot, Schmitz advised in an ACEP news release.

And, never, ever leave a child or pet unattended in a hot car, she emphasized. Temperatures inside a vehicle can soar to dangerous levels in minutes, even with a window left cracked open.

"Many heat emergencies are preventable," Schmitz said. "Drink plenty of water and take breaks from the sun when the day's plans include significant time outside. If a medical crisis occurs, emergency physicians are ready to care for you."

Knowing what to do is key, because [heat waves](#) are longer and more frequent than ever, scientists say.

In the United States, the average number of [heat waves](#) has tripled, from two per year in the 1960s to six in the 2010s, the *Times* reported. Compared to the 1960s, heat wave season is also 45 days longer, it added.

As such, sunburns and [heat stroke](#) are dangers to be aware of and take precautions to avoid, Schmitz said.

For sunburn, mild irritation or blisters can be treated at home or as directed by a physician. A sunburn becomes an emergency when it is accompanied by fever or chills, nausea or vomiting, or confusion, Schmitz said.

Worrisome signs of heat cramps include muscle spasms in the legs or stomach. You can treat cramps by having the person rest in a cool place and giving those who are conscious small amounts of fluid. Do not administer salt tablets, Schmitz said.

Check for signs of heat-related illness.

Early signs include cool, moist, pale or flushed skin, headache, lightheadedness or weakness. People with these symptoms should immediately rest in a cool place, drink non-alcoholic and non-caffeinated fluids, and apply a cool wet cloth or water mist.

If the person has continued or worsening heat-related symptoms and illness, place cold packs on his or her wrists and ankles, the groin area, neck and armpits.

Call 911 or seek immediate medical attention when symptoms include pale skin, rapid pulse, nausea or vomiting, confusion, loss of consciousness, or high body temperature. If the person becomes unconscious, administer CPR, if trained to do so.

Be aware that humidity can add to the misery of high temperatures. The [National Weather Service](#) has a handy guide to how hot it really feels.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on [staying cool in hot weather](#).

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