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**NEWS RELEASE: Heat-Related Illness**

Each year more people in the United States die from extreme heat exposure than from hurricanes, lightning, tornadoes, floods, and earthquakes combined. On average, about 300 people die each year from exposure to heat.

The Otsego County Department of Health recommends that everyone understand the warning signs of heat-related illness and take special care of those at risk.

The elderly and young children are at particular risk for heat illness. People suffer heat-related illness when their bodies are unable to properly cool themselves. The body normally cools itself by sweating. When humidity levels are high, sweat will not evaporate as quickly, preventing the body from releasing heat quickly.

Other conditions lending themselves to increased risk are obesity, fever, dehydration, heart disease, mental illness, poor circulation, sunburn, prescription drug use, and alcohol use.

Air conditioning provides the best protection from heat exposure and heat-related deaths. However some people may be fearful of high utility bills and limit their use of air conditioning. This places people who may be already at risk for heat illness at increased risk.

Many people think electric fans are sufficient during extreme heat. Fans may provide comfort, but they will not prevent heat-related illness when the temperature is in the high 90s.

Heat-stroke is a severe illness that occurs when the body is unable to regulate its temperature. The body's temperature rises rapidly, the sweating mechanism fails, and the body is unable to cool down. Body temperature may rise to 106 degrees Fahrenheit or higher within 10 to 15 minutes. This type of heat-related illness can cause death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not provided.

Warning signs of heat illness vary but may include:

- extremely high body temperature (above 103 degrees Fahrenheit)
- red, hot, and dry skin (no sweating)
- throbbing headache
- dizziness, nausea and confusion
- unconsciousness

Heat exhaustion is a milder form of heat-related illness that can develop after several days of exposure to high temperatures and inadequate or unbalanced replacement of fluids. If left untreated, it can progress to more serious heat stroke.

Those most prone to heat exhaustion are the elderly, people with high blood pressure, and people working or exercising in a hot environment.

The warning signs of heat exhaustion include:

heavy sweating	paleness
muscle cramps	tiredness
weakness	dizziness
headache	nausea or vomiting
fainting	skin may be cool and moist

It's important to learn how to manage during hot weather said. The Otsego County Department of Health recommends the following:

- Take a cool shower or bath.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Don't drink liquids that contain caffeine, alcohol, or large amounts of sugar - these actually cause you to lose more body fluid. Also, avoid very cold drinks because they can cause stomach cramps.
- Stay indoors and, if at all possible, stay in an air-conditioned place. If your home does not have air conditioning, go to a shopping mall, senior center, or public library - - even a few hours spent in air conditioning can help your body stay cooler when you go back into the heat.

If you must be out in the heat:

- Limit your outdoor activity to morning and evening hours.
- Cut down on physical activity.
- Drink plenty of water.
- Try to rest often in shady areas.
- Protect yourself from the sun by wearing a ventilated hat (such as straw or mesh) and sunglasses, and put on sun screen.
- Wear lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing.
- NEVER leave anyone in a closed, parked vehicle.

To learn more about heat-related illness, visit the New York State Department of Health web site at [www.nyhealth.gov](http://www.nyhealth.gov). or call the Otsego County Department of Health @ 607-547-4230