Reed College Occupational Health and Safety Committee Presents

Your Health

Your Safety

Our Concern

Summer Safety

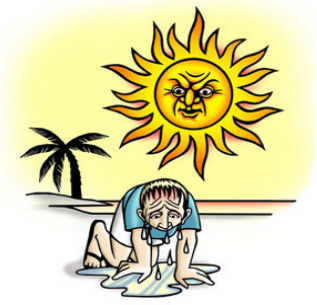
Summertime in Portland is incredible. Everybody comes out to play—the sun, and the pale masses. Sometimes one forgets what it is like to live with the sun during those nine long months spent inside. So for all the Portland cave dwellers out there, this one's for you.

Heat Wave

Summer heat can bring great swimming, but unfortunately also have the potential to cause heat stokes and other heat-related illness.

Summer brings many things, and unfortunately heat waves are among them. When the air temperature reaches about 95°F, the body's ability to thermo-regulate becomes ineffective. When humidity exceeds 75%, cooling via sweat evaporation also loses efficacy. Once the body's mechanisms for temperature regulation begin to fail, heat illnesses start cropping up.

These illnesses manifest themselves in a variety of stages, beginning with minor heat rashes and heat cramps to potentially fatal heat stroke. General care for these illnesses includes cooling the body, drinking hydrating fluids (alcohol and caffeine do not apply), and minimizing shock to the body. But heat-related illnesses are usually preventable. Drinking lots of water, staying as cool as possible, and not exerting too much energy on hot days are easy ways stay healthy and enjoy the sun.



Stage 1—Heat Cramps: Although minor in nature, these muscle cramps can be extremely uncomfortable. When heat cramps come on, take a rest in the shade, drink some water, and slowly begin stretching and massaging the aching muscles. If no other signs of heat illness pop up, you can resume activity once cramping is over. Just remember to take it easy and listen to your body.

Stage 2—Heat Exhaustion: Often signaled by nausea, weakness, lightheadedness, and pale, moist skin, this stage occurs when the body's temperature exceeds 102˚F. Heat exhaustion is treated by cooling the body as quickly as possible—relocating the person to a cool environment, offering cold liquids, wet towel wraps, and fanning.

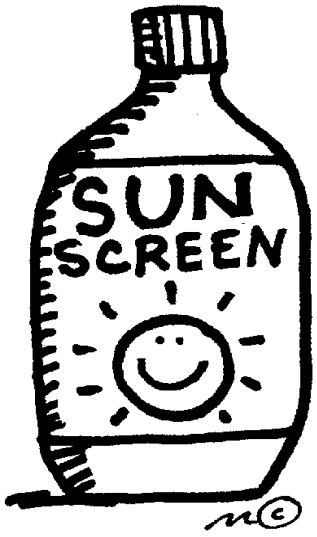
Stage 3—Heat Stroke: By far the most serious heat-related illness is heatstroke, which comes in two flavors: Exertional Heat Stroke (EHS), caused by overtaxing the body during vigorous exercise in a hot environment; and Classic/Non-Exertional (NEHS) Heat Stroke which tends to befall babies, the elderly, or mobility-impaired individuals who are less aware of or less able to change their environment during a hot spell. Signals of heat stroke are vomiting, decreased alertness or loss of consciousness, high body temperature (sometimes as high as 105˚F), a rapid, weak pulse, and rapid, shallow breathing.

If you suspect someone may be suffering heat stoke, call 911 first and attempt to cool the person while awaiting the medics. Keep the person lying down, wrap him in wet sheets, and fan him. Wrap ice packs or cold packs in cloth and place them on each of the person's wrists, ankles, armpits, and neck to cool the large blood vessels. Watch for signals of breathing problems and make sure the airways are clear.

Burnin' Up

Sunburns: what a sad end to a perfectly lovely day at the beach. It goes without saying that burning the upper layers of your skin is not a good thing. Premature aging, wrinkles, and skin cancer are all linked with too much exposure to the sun's ultraviolet rays. Whether you work outside, play outside, or both, it's a snap to avoid the annoying and unnecessary discomfort of sunburn. There's even an easy to remember A-B-C mnemonic for sunburn prevention:

- Avoid the sun between 10:00 am and 3:00 pm.
- Block UV rays with sunscreen that is SPF 15 or higher; apply it half an hour before heading outside and reapply often, especially after swimming or heavy sweating.
- Cover up with clothes and a brimmed hat.



Even the most safety-conscious of us may get distracted while lapping up the lush rays of sun. If you do get burned, usually a liberal and repeated application of aloe over the red area will alleviate discomfort and help the skin to heal. However if there are blisters or leaking sores, then your sunburn is a 2nd or 3rd degree burn and you should seek medical attention.

It's Electric

Summer is lightning season in the US! Every year at least 300 people in the nation are injured by lightning, and an average of 67 annual lighting fatalities have been recorded over the last 30 years.

At any given moment, there may be approximately 2,000 thunderstorms in existence worldwide. Though the majority of lightning flashes are cloud-to-cloud, the destruction a ground strike can cause makes these events worthy of concern. Lightning bolts can zap electronics, start fires, cause explosions, and of course inflict serious (potentially fatal) injuries.

If you see dark clouds building while you're outdoors, stay on the alert. Once you see a lightning bolt, use the 30/30 rule to help determine your risk. Start counting immediately after the flash. If you hear thunder before you've counted to 30, then the storm is within 6 miles of you. In this case, it's advisable to go indoors, keep away from the phone and plumbing, and stay inside until 30 minutes after the thunder stops.

The most dangerous place to be during a lightning storm is outdoors; if there is no suitable shelter in range (note that metal sheds, greenhouses, and other non-habitable structures are NOT suitable shelter) you may be relatively safe sitting inside a hard top vehicle. If you are stranded in the open during a storm, stay far away from bodies of water, trees, power lines, electrically conductive materials, large concrete structures (which often have imbedded metal frames), and anything tall.

SOURCES:

www.redcross.org/services/hss/sumsafety/index.html
www.fda.gov/fdac/features/2004/304_summer.html