



HEAT ILLNESSES: Who Is at Risk & Why?

Heat illnesses can affect anyone, but there are some groups that are more at risk. Understanding who is more at risk can help us know who should take extra precautions or who we should check in on during a heat wave. Here is a list of groups that are more at risk and a brief explanation of why.

WHO IS MORE AT RISK?

- People who are unsheltered or unhoused
- People with limited resources
- Socially, culturally, linguistically isolated
- People with certain medical conditions
- People taking certain medicines/medications
- People with certain physical disabilities
- Infants and children (<4)
- People who are pregnant and/or nursing
- Older adults (60+)
- Outdoor workers
- People who do outdoor activities/play outdoor sports



UNSHELTERED OR UNHOUSED

May lack access to:

- Water
- Shade
- Air-conditioning (AC)
- Transportation to public places with AC (e.g., cooling centers, shopping malls, libraries)
- Ways to receive public health and emergency warnings (e.g., via internet or cell phone)

LIMITED RESOURCES

May lack access to:

- Air-conditioning (AC) or money to pay electric bills
- Transportation to public places with AC (e.g., cooling centers, shopping malls, libraries)
- Housing that allows modification (e.g., addition of AC or shade awnings for renters)
- Material resources (e.g., water or light-weight clothing) to cope with high temperatures
- Ways to receive public health and emergency warnings (e.g., via internet or cell phone)

ISOLATION

- Linguistic isolation: language barriers or low literacy can limit access to or understanding of public health and emergency warnings
- Cultural isolation: lack of familiarity with protection measures, or different cultural practices, can inhibit action
- Social isolation: lack of a support system can prevent people from seeking or receiving help, especially if they have limited mobility (e.g., if they are homebound)

MEDICAL CONDITIONS

- Certain medical conditions can affect the body's ability to maintain a normal temperature, for example:
 - Diabetes
 - Heart disease
 - Neurodegenerative disorders
- If you have an existing medical condition, check with your doctor to learn if you are at risk

MEDICINES/MEDICATIONS

- Certain medicines/medications can affect the body's ability to cool down, including:
 - Antidepressants (for depression and anxiety)
 - Antihistamines (for allergies)
 - Antipsychotics (for psychotic disorders, like schizophrenia)
 - Antihypertensives (for high blood pressure)
 - Diuretics (for increased urine production)
- This does not apply to all brands of these medicines/medications
- If you take any medicines/medications, check with your doctor to learn if you are at risk

DISABILITIES

- Certain disabilities can worsen during heat or interfere with the body's ability to cool down, for example:
 - Some multiple sclerosis symptoms worsen in heat
 - Some spinal cord injuries prevent sweating
 - People with limited mobility may not be able to access public places with AC
- Some visual impairments can impede access to public health and emergency warnings
- If you have a disability, check with your doctor to learn if you are at risk

INFANTS & CHILDREN (<4 years of age)

- Overheat quickly
- Dehydrate quickly
- Sweat less
- May not be able to communicate symptoms (e.g., babies and small children)

PREGNANT AND/OR NURSING

- Bodies have to work harder to cool both the pregnant person and the baby
- More likely to become dehydrated
- Heat exhaustion and heat stroke can occur more quickly

OLDER ADULTS (60+)

- Bodies don't cool down as easily
- More likely to have an existing medical condition that affects the body's ability to maintain a normal temperature

- More likely to take prescription medications that affect the body's ability to cool down
- May be homebound or have limited ability for accessing public places with AC

OUTDOOR WORKERS

- Physical activity increases body temperature
- Working on a hot day can make it harder for the body to get rid of extra heat, especially if it's humid
- Often exposed to heat throughout the day and may lack shade during breaks/lunch
- New workers may not be acclimated to heat
- Not drinking enough fluids during the day can cause dehydration
- Heavier, darker colored, and less breathable work clothing traps heat

OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES/SPORTS

- Exercising increases body temperature
- Exercising on a hot day can make it harder for the body to get rid of extra heat, especially if it's humid
- Not drinking enough fluids during exercise can cause dehydration
- Synthetic turf fields can become superheated on warm, sunny days

HEAT RISK