

Officials Offer Summer Preparedness Tips For Seniors And Individuals With Disabilities

SACRAMENTO - Officials with the California Emergency Management Agency (Cal EMA) and the state **California Department of Public Health (CDPH)** recommended today that seniors, people with disabilities and other health conditions take steps now to prepare for the possibility of prolonged heat waves later this summer.

"As we saw last year, prolonged exposure to excessive heat can take a toll on seniors, people with disabilities and other health conditions," said **State Public Health Officer, Dr. Mark Horton**.

Horton and Cal EMA's Acting Secretary Matthew Bettenhausen, urged people with disabilities, seniors and others with health conditions to review the signs and symptoms associated with heat stroke and heat exhaustion; arrange for a relative, friend or neighbor to check on them; arrange for transportation to a local cooling center; and replenish their water, prescription medications and other emergency supplies.

They also suggested the creation of a cooler environment by making sure window air conditioners are installed snugly, making sure window air conditioners and air conditioning ducts are insulated properly, weather stripping doors and sills, and placing window reflectors made of cardboard and covered with aluminum foil between windows and drapes.

"The safety of all Californians, particularly people with disabilities and seniors, is our utmost concern," said Bettenhausen. "Simple actions taken now - before the next round of extremely high temperatures -- can mean the difference between life and death."

The remarks from Horton and Bettenhausen come in conjunction with the "seasonal readiness" of the state's new Contingency Plan for Extreme Heat Emergencies. The plan, which was developed by a multi-disciplinary task force at the direction of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger after the July 2006 heat wave caused more than 130 deaths, outlines state operations during excessive heat emergencies and provides planning guidance for local governments, nonprofit organizations and the private sector.

In addition to their efforts to public increase awareness of risk of prolonged exposure to heat, state-agency actions during the "seasonal readiness" phase include:

- ¥ Internal procedure and resource reviews by and coordination among key state to identify potential issues and problems;
- ¥ Contact by Cal EMA with county emergency officials to determine the status of local preparedness activities;
- ¥ The monitoring of heat-related unusual occurrences at long-term care facilities by the California Department of Public Health;
- ¥ The distribution of heat-related preparedness tips by the California Department of Social Services to its licensed facilities to ensure they are prepared to meet the needs of their clients if a heat wave occurs;
- ¥ The dissemination of notifications to schools regarding the need to review procedures and practices in response to excessive heat emergencies; and

¥ Checks by state Department of Mental Health Licensing reviewers of facility disaster and emergency preparedness plans for all mental health rehabilitation centers and psychiatric health facilities to ensure they are up-to-date.

Californian's can better prepare for increased temperatures by following these tips:

Stay Cool Indoors

The best way to beat the heat is to stay in an air conditioned area. If you don't have an air conditioner, go to a shopping mall or public building for a few hours. A cool shower or bath is also a good way to cool off.

Wear Light Clothing and Sunscreen

Wear as little clothing as possible when you are at home. Choose lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing. In the hot sun, a wide-brimmed hat will keep the head cool. If you will be in direct sun, use a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher and follow package directions. Reapply every 2 hours while in the sun.

Schedule Outdoor Activities Carefully

Try to be less active during the hottest part of the day, late afternoon. If you must be out in the heat, plan your activities so that you are outdoors either before noon or in the evening. While outdoors, rest often in a shady area. Never leave kids or pets in a parked car.

Pace Yourself

If you are not used to working or exercising in hot weather, start slowly and pick up the pace gradually. Take frequent, regularly scheduled breaks. If activity in the heat makes your heart pound or leaves you gasping for breath, stop activity; get into a cool or shady area, and rest. Especially if you become lightheaded, confused, weak or feel faint.

Use a Buddy System

During a heat wave, check on your friends and family and have someone do the same for you. If you know someone who is elderly or has a health condition, check on him or her twice a day during a heat wave. Watch for signs of heat exhaustion or heat stroke.

High temperatures can cause serious health problems. Know the symptoms of heat-related illness and be ready to help.

Warning: If your doctor limits the amount of fluid you drink, or if you take water pills, ask him or her how much you should drink when the weather is hot. If you are on a low-salt diet, talk with your doctor before drinking a sports beverage.

Additional tips on preparing for heat-related emergencies are available on the CAL EMA and CDPH and web sites at <http://www.calema.ca.gov> and <http://www.cdph.ca.gov>, respectively.

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