



# Georgia State Council of the Emergency Nurses Association

## NEWS RELEASE

June 19, 2009

Contact: Jack Rodgers, RN

706-392-0155

## Near-Record Temperatures Send Georgia Residents Scrambling Indoors to Beat the Summer Heat

### Triple Digit Heat Indices Signal Need for Caution during Outdoor Activities

Columbus, GA – Hot conditions in the southeastern U.S. are making headlines nationwide – and forecasters say it will be several days before Georgia residents will see any relief from the searing heat. As the official start of the summer season approaches, Georgia’s emergency nurses are urging everyone to use caution if it’s necessary to spend time outdoors.

“We’re already seeing heat-related illnesses come through our department”, says Mike Hill, RN, an Emergency Department clinical coordinator at Columbus’ St. Francis Hospital. “We’re telling everybody to be careful if they have to go outside”.

To combat the dehydration that can lead to heat-related illnesses, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention offer the following common-sense tips:

- Drink more fluids, regardless of your activity level. Don’t wait until you’re thirsty to drink. *Warning:* If your doctor generally limits the amount of fluid you drink or has you on water pills, ask how much you should drink while the weather is hot.
- Don’t drink liquids that contain 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 the shopping mall or public library—even a few hours spent in air conditioning can help your body stay cooler when you go back into the heat. Call your local health department to see if there are any heat-relief shelters in your area.
- Electric fans may provide comfort, but when the temperature is in the high 90s, fans will not prevent heat-related illness. Taking a cool shower or bath, or moving to an air-conditioned place is a much better way to cool off.
- Wear lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing.
- NEVER leave anyone in a closed, parked vehicle.
- Although any one at any time can suffer from heat-related illness, some people are at greater risk than others. Check regularly on:
  - Infants and young children
  - People aged 65 or older
  - People who have a mental illness
  - Those who are physically ill, especially with heart disease or high blood pressure

If you must be out in the heat:

- Limit your outdoor activity to morning and evening hours.
- Cut down on exercise. If you must exercise, drink two to four glasses of cool, nonalcoholic fluids each hour. A sports beverage can replace the salt and minerals you lose in sweat. Warning: If you are on a low-salt diet, talk with your doctor before drinking a sports beverage. Remember the warning in the first “tip” (above), too.
- Try to rest often in shady areas.
- Protect yourself from the sun by wearing a wide-brimmed hat (also keeps you cooler) and sunglasses and by putting on sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher (the most effective products say “broad spectrum” or “UVA/UVB protection” on their labels).

But even with the proper preparation, heat-related problem can occur. Hill says it’s important to be aware of the warning signs that go along with exposure to extreme temperatures – and they can range from simply irritating to severe. “Someone with a **mild heat illness** may have cramps that start all of a sudden in the hands and lower legs.”

People suffering from **heat exhaustion** may present with the following symptoms: fatigue or weakness, headache, nausea, muscle cramps, extreme thirst, confusion, excessive sweating with cold/clammy skin, dizziness or agitation. Remember, heat exhaustion requires prompt medical attention but is usually not life threatening.

**Heat stroke**, on the other hand, can be fatal. Look for these signs/symptoms: nausea and vomiting, headache, dizziness or vertigo, fatigue, hot, flushed, dry skin, rapid heart rate, decreased sweating, shortness of breath, increased body temperature (104 to 106 degrees Fahrenheit), confusion, delirium or loss of consciousness and seizures.

“Anyone with any of these complaints should see their doctor or visit the nearest hospital emergency department.

### **About the Emergency Nurses Association**

The Emergency Nurses Association (ENA) is the only professional nursing organization dedicated to defining the future of emergency nursing and emergency care through advocacy, expertise, innovation and leadership. Founded in 1970, ENA serves as the voice of more than 35,000 members and their patients through research, publications, professional development, injury prevention and patient education. Additional information is available at ENA’s web site - [www.ena.org](http://www.ena.org).

The Georgia ENA Council represents over 800 members all across the Peach State. Local chapters serve the Albany, Atlanta, Columbus, Macon Savannah and northwest Georgia areas. For more information on the Georgia State Council, look at our web site at [www.gaena.org](http://www.gaena.org).

# # # #