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American Red Cross Urges Caution During High Temperatures to Come
The Elderly and Children are the Most Susceptible to Heat Injury & Illness

Springfield, IL: With temperatures expected to climb into the 90s this weekend, the Illinois Capital Area Chapter of the American Red Cross is urging Central Illinois residents to take precautions against the coming heat.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 400 Americans die each year due to summer's heat. Furthermore, the National Weather Service asserts that excessive heat is the number one weather-related killer, causing more fatalities per year than floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, winter storms and extreme cold.

Everyone is at risk when temperatures rise above 90 degrees, but the elderly and children under the age of 12 are most susceptible to heat and heat-related illnesses. Heat-related illnesses can cause serious injury and even death if unattended. Signs of heat-related illnesses include nausea, dizziness, flushed or pale skin, heavy sweating and headaches. Victims of heat-related illness should be moved to a cool place, given small amounts of cool water to drink, and cool wet cloths should be applied to the skin. If a victim refuses water, vomits or loses consciousness, call 9-1-1 or a local emergency number immediately.

"Our primary goal is to mitigate these emergencies by educating the community about how they can protect themselves and their families from heat-related illness," said Chris Shanahan, Director of Community Health & Safety for the Illinois Capital Area Chapter. "Anyone interested in learning more about heat illnesses and injuries, and how to prevent them, can contact the Illinois Capital Area Chapter for literature and advice."

The Red Cross urges the community to follow the following heat-safety tips:

- **Dress for the heat.** Wear lightweight, light-colored clothing. Light colors will reflect away some of the sun's energy. It is also a good idea to wear hats and use an umbrella while outside.
- **Drink water.** Carry water or juice with you and drink it continuously even if you do not feel thirsty.
- **Slow down and avoid strenuous activity.** If you must do strenuous activity, do it during the coolest part of the day, which is usually in the morning between 4 a.m. and 8 a.m.
- **Stay indoors when possible.** If air-conditioning is not available, stay on the lowest floor out of the sunshine. If transportation is available, travel to places that do have air-conditioning, including malls and homes of friends, neighbors or relatives. Buy electric fans to help circulate air.
- **Be a good neighbor.** During heat waves, check on elderly residents in your neighborhood and those who do not have air-conditioning.
- **Learn Red Cross first-aid and CPR.** While the above tips can help prevent emergencies, it is crucial to know what to do if an emergency situation arises.

Know what these heat-related terms mean:

- **Heat cramps:** Heat cramps are muscular pains and spasms due to heavy exertion. Although heat cramps are the least severe, they are an early signal that the body is having trouble with the heat.
- **Heat exhaustion:** Heat exhaustion typically occurs when people exercise heavily or work in a hot, humid place where body fluids are lost through heavy sweating. Blood flow can decrease to the vital organs and result in a mild form of shock. If not treated, the victim may suffer heat stroke. Signals of heat exhaustion include cool, moist, pale, flush, or red skin; heavy sweating; headache; nausea; vomiting; dizziness; and exhaustion. Body temperature will remain near normal.
- **Heat stroke:** Also known as sun stroke, heat stroke is life threatening. The victim's temperature control system, which produces sweating to cool the body, stops working. The body temperature can rise so high that brain damage and death may result if the body is not cooled quickly. Signals include hot, red and dry skin; changes in consciousness; rapid, weak pulse; and rapid, shallow breathing.

Follow these general tips for heat emergencies:

- **Heat cramps or heat exhaustion:** Get the person to a cooler place and have him or her rest in a comfortable position. If the person is fully awake and alert, give half a glass of cool water every 15 minutes. Do not let him or her drink too quickly. Do not give liquids that contain alcohol or caffeine. Remove or loosen tight clothing and apply cool, wet cloths, such as towels or sheets. Call 9-1-1 or the local emergency number if the person refuses water, vomits or loses consciousness.
- **Heat stroke:** Heat stroke is a life-threatening situation! Help is needed fast. Call 9-1-1 or your local emergency number. Move the person to a cooler place. Quickly cool the body. Immerse victim in a cool bath, or wrap wet sheets around the body and fan it. Watch for signals of breathing problems. Keep the person lying down and continue to cool the body any way you can. If the victim refuses water or is vomiting or there are changes in the level of consciousness, do not give anything to eat or drink.

For more information regarding heat emergencies, prevention and treatment, please call Chris Shanahan at (217) 787-7602 x223.

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