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HIGH TEMPERATURES, HIGH RISK

Summer months are the most hazardous time of the year for many Texas residents. The Texas Department of Health reports that there were 40 heat-related deaths in the state last year. In most cases, these were preventable.

Exposure to high temperatures can lead to a severe loss of salt and water in the body, resulting in heat exhaustion. When the body can no longer cool itself by sweating, a life threatening condition called heat stroke may develop.

Elderly individuals with low fixed incomes are especially at risk because they may avoid using air conditioners and fans to cool their homes due to worries about high electric bills. Making the situation worse, doors and windows are sometimes kept shut, cutting off ventilation in the house.

The Visiting Nurse Association has suggestions for reducing the incidence of heat-caused illnesses:

- Drink plenty of fluids each day. Drinking water helps cool the body's temperature.
- Avoid turning on the stove or large oven. Instead, use a microwave or toaster-type oven to prepare food.
- Stay out of direct sunlight as much as possible. If it's necessary to go outside, wear a hat or sunbonnet. Avoid being outdoors between 2 p.m. and 4 p.m., when the heat is most intense.
- Wear light-colored cotton clothing or cotton blends that are loose fitting. Avoid both outer and undergarments that are tight.
- Close blinds and window shades during the day to block out sunlight.

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- In addition to an air conditioner, electric floor and ceiling fans can be used to circulate air that will help cool the body.
- Instead of turning off air conditioners and fans because of fears about high electric bills, individuals should contact their utility company to learn about assistance that may be available to low-income residents during the hot summer months.
- Individuals 65 years of age and older should have a friend or relative check on them or call twice a day during a heat wave.

“These recommendations are particularly important for those most at risk – the homebound elderly,” advises Shelley Dodd, R.N., branch supervisor of the Visiting Nurse Association’s Tarrant County office in Fort Worth. “Taking a few precautions is key to staying well,” she adds.



The homebound elderly are especially at risk for heat-related illness and are advised to follow certain precautions during hot summer months.

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