Be Prepared for Extreme Heat

Adapted from an article by Kathleen Votava, Office of Regional Operations, Administration for Community Living. The Administration for Community Living (ACL) works with agencies such as Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response (ASPR), and others to help spread the word about extreme heat.

As summer is upon us, this is an important reminder regarding planning for and responding to periods of extreme heat. Faith communities can be vital resources for older adults, individuals with a disability, or family members caring for a loved one with functional needs. During periods of extreme heat, faith communities can help their members and neighbors take steps to put plans in place and prepare for potential risks, such as power outages. By helping people evaluate their own personal needs and making an emergency plan, they can be better prepared for any situation.

Some actions you can help people take include:

- Consider how periods of extreme heat, including risk for potential power outages, might affect individual needs.
- Make a plan for being able to manage independently for a few days when there may not be access to a medical facility or a pharmacy.
- Identify what kind of resources people use on a daily basis and how to cope if they are limited or not available. For example, make provisions for medications that require refrigeration or plan arrangements for any assistance to get to a cooling center if needed.
- **Build A Kit**, a collection of basic items your household may need in the event of an emergency. What do you need to maintain your health, safety, and independence during periods of extreme heat? For example, include any specialized items that you may need such as extra wheelchair batteries, oxygen, catheters, medication, food and water for service animals, and any other items that you might need.
- Plan to check on service animals more frequently to ensure that they are not suffering from the heat.

As a faith community, one of the most important things you can do is to make a plan to check on members, family, friends, and neighbors who do not have air conditioning, who spend much of their time alone or who are more likely to be affected by the heat.

Dear God. We are thankful for the seasons. Give us the wisdom to prepare for and help each other in times when nature can overwhelm us with too much of a good thing!

Heat Stroke/Heat Exhaustion

This summer is expected to be one of the hottest on record, and with extreme temperatures come the dangers of heat stroke and heat exhaustion.

According to a report by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), this past May was the 30th consecutive month of soaring global temperatures. In fact, this is the longest and hottest streak since the NOAA started recording temperatures back in 1880.

With record warmth, it is important to remember the health risks associated with heat and the safety precautions that can be taken during extremely high temperatures.

**Heat stroke** occurs when the body becomes unable to regulate its temperature and can lead to death or permanent disability. High body temperatures; red, dry skin with no sweating; strong pulse and a throbbing headache are the biggest indicators of heat stroke in a patient. In later stages, confusion and disorientation can also suggest heat stroke.

**Heat exhaustion**, on the other hand, is a more mild illness and results from excessive exposure to high temperatures and inadequate or unbalanced replacement of fluids. The most common warning signs are heavy sweating, paleness, nausea, vomiting and fatigue.

“Although heat exhaustion is not as serious as heat stroke, be sure to monitor your symptoms, because it can turn into heat stroke if it’s not addressed. If you start to vomit or experience any symptoms of heat stroke, seek medical attention immediately,” says Dr. Matthew Belden, an emergency department physician at Advocate Good Samaritan Hospital’s in Downers Grove, IL.

Dr. Belden suggests the following tips to stay cool and avoid heat illness this summer:

- Stay indoors as much as possible and limit your exposure to the sun. This is the easiest way to reduce your contact with the heat.
- Wear light-weight, loose-fitting clothes.
- Drink plenty of water throughout the day to prevent dehydration.
- Turn on the air-conditioning in your house or spend some time in an air-conditioned public place such as the library, mall or movie theater.
- Don’t overexert yourself by working or exercising outside. If you do have to work outside, be sure to drink plenty of water and take frequent breaks to ensure you don’t overheat.

Resources: Advocate Health Care: Advocatehealth.com; ready.gov/heat