

Wellness Articles

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If you would like to be added to the distribution list for these articles, please email: Rebecca.johnson2@albertahealthservices.ca. You will receive a monthly email containing articles for the upcoming four weeks.

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Remember sun and water safety this summer

Warmer weather means the opportunity to get outside and have fun. Cooling off in Alberta's lakes, splash parks or indoor and outdoor pools is a great way to spend time with family and friends, but it is important to stay safe.

Heat Health

People can be affected by heat in several ways, from mild to life-threatening.

- **Heat exhaustion** is a loss of water and salt in the body. Symptoms include: dizziness or fainting, weakness; nausea, vomiting and diarrhea; heavy sweating, muscle cramps; thirst and less urine production; headache; rapid breathing and heart beat. Heat exhaustion can lead to heat stroke.
- **Heat stroke** is a medical emergency. Symptoms include: high body temperature (above 40° C); lack of sweat; disorientation; loss of consciousness. Seek immediate medical attention.

The most effective way to stay healthy in the heat is to avoid going outdoors between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m., typically the hottest hours of the day. If you don't have air conditioning, go into the coolest, safest place you can find, perhaps a basement. If that's not an option, find a cool location such as a shopping centre or movie theatre where you can stay for a while.

Check in on people in your life who are at-risk – people who live alone or those who are socially isolated – and ensure they are not in the heat. Cool them off and give them fluids.

Protect yourself from the sun's UV rays:

- Wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses (with a UVA/UVB CSA certified seal). If possible, wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts that cover skin.
- Apply a sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) 30 or higher, at least 20 minutes before going outside. Be sure the SPF 30 screens out both UVA and UVB rays and reapply frequently.
- Drink lots of water and other non-alcoholic, non-caffeinated beverages to stay hydrated.

- Seek cool areas away from direct sun. Find shade or stay inside air-conditioned spaces. Sometimes a cool bath or shower can help. Limit outdoor physical activity during the hottest part of the day, or wait until it is cooler.

These guidelines are particularly important for individuals who are at greater risk of suffering from a heat-related illness, such as young children, older adults and those with chronic medical conditions.

Recreational Water

There is always potential risk when swimming, especially in unmonitored bodies of water. Here are a few ways you can prevent water-related injuries:

- Wear a life jacket and make sure it fits.
- Before and during water activities, avoid alcohol or cannabis and any other substances that may cause impaired judgement.
- Swim with someone you trust. Children should be accompanied by an adult or responsible person.
- Be aware of fast-moving water.
- Be aware of exhaust from boats and generators.
- Remember that lakes, rivers and streams may contain disease-causing microorganisms.
- There are considerable safety risks with swimming in unmonitored, open bodies of water. Swimming or playing in lakes, streams or rivers can result in drowning, injuries, swimmer's itch, rashes or diarrhea.
- Swim only at designated beaches that are monitored for biological, chemical and physical hazards. Look for posted signs at designated beach areas.
- Avoid swallowing river, stream or lake water.
- Do not swim in water that looks stagnant, muddy or smells unpleasant.
- Do not use irrigation canals for recreational purposes.
- Prevent broken skin from directly contacting recreational water.
- If possible, wash your hands and rinse your body off after swimming or wading in lakes, streams or rivers.