

Heat Safety 101: Essential Tips to Stay Safe in Extreme Heat

As we face another intense summer in Houston, it's crucial to be prepared for the extreme heat. With a growing number of people moving to Houston, many might not be familiar with how dangerous the heat can be. Did you know that heat-related fatalities annually outnumber those from hurricanes, floods, and tornadoes combined? In fact, FEMA is planning to add extreme heat to its list of disaster triggers. To help you stay safe, we've compiled some essential tips to beat the heat.

We've seen firsthand the dangers of extreme heat. Heat-related emergencies are preventable with the right precautions. Here are some essential tips divided into three categories: BEFORE, DURING, and AFTER exposure to extreme heat.

BEFORE THE HEAT

- **Stay Hydrated:** Make sure you drink plenty of water throughout the day. Don't wait until you're thirsty to drink water. Staying hydrated is crucial, especially in extreme heat. One simple way to ensure you're drinking enough water is to monitor your urine. Aim to drink enough so that you're still peeing regularly, and your urine should be relatively clear. Darker urine can be a sign of dehydration. Remember, your body loses water faster in the heat, so keep sipping water throughout the day to stay hydrated and healthy
- **Plan Ahead:** Schedule outdoor activities during the cooler parts of the day, such as early morning or late evening. If you can't avoid the heat of the day, give yourself a break the day before!
- **Know Your Limits:** Understand your physical limitations, especially if you are not acclimated to the heat. While you may be accustom to working in the heat, remember that our heat is different!
- **Check Your Medications:** Some medications can increase sensitivity to heat. Speak with your healthcare provider about how your medications might affect you during high temperatures. Additionally many medications cause increase risk of sunburn, more than 5 sunburns doubles your risk of skin cancer!
- **Pet Safety:** Ensure your pets have plenty of fresh water and shade. Remember, the concrete can get extremely hot and burn their paws. If it's too hot for you to walk barefoot, it's too hot for them.

DURING THE HEAT

- **Stay Cool Indoors:** Spend time in air-conditioned places. If your home doesn't have air conditioning, consider visiting public places like malls, libraries, or community centers. Even that is not an option, make sure the air is moving around you to promote convective cooling!
- **Dress Appropriately:** Wear lightweight, loose-fitting, and light-colored clothing. A wide-brimmed hat can also help keep you cool.
- **Use Sunscreen:** Protect your skin from sunburn, which can hinder your body's ability to stay cool. More than 2 people die of skin cancer in the US every hour!

- **Avoid Direct Sun:** Stay in the shade as much as possible and avoid strenuous activities during peak sun hours.
- **Cooling Techniques:** Contrary to popular belief, dousing yourself in water might make your heat stress worse due to high humidity preventing effective convective cooling. Use fans or a cool cloth on your skin instead.

AFTER EXPOSURE

- **Monitor for Heat Illness:** Be aware of the signs of heat-related illnesses, such as heat exhaustion and heat stroke. Symptoms include heavy sweating, weakness, confusion, dizziness, nausea, and a rapid pulse. If someone shows signs of heat stroke, seek medical attention immediately.
- **Cool Down Gradually:** If you've been exposed to extreme heat, cool down gradually. Drink water, take a cool shower, or use a damp cloth on your skin.
- **Rest and Recover:** Give your body time to recover after being in the heat. Avoid strenuous activities until you've fully recovered.

Important Facts and Safety Tips

- **Heat and Workers:** Heat is especially dangerous for those who work outdoors or in hot environments. Each year, thousands of workers suffer from heat-related illnesses, and tragically, some lose their lives. Last summer, workers like Gabriel Infante in San Antonio and Esteban Chavez Jr. in Pasadena, California, died due to extreme heat conditions on the job.
- **Heat Fatalities and Injuries:** According to a report from Public Citizen, an estimated 2,000 workers die, and 170,000 are injured by heat each year in the U.S. The risk is particularly high for those in construction, agriculture, and delivery jobs.
- **Economic Impact:** The economic consequences of heat-related productivity losses are immense, potentially reaching \$100 billion annually under current conditions and escalating further with worsening climate change.
- **Regulatory Actions:** Some states are beginning to implement heat protection measures for workers. California recently voted to establish heat protections for indoor workers, and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is expected to propose new rules to protect workers from heat illness and death.

Urban Heat Considerations

- **Heat Island Effect:** Urban areas can be significantly hotter than surrounding rural areas due to concrete, asphalt, and buildings absorbing and retaining heat. This can exacerbate heat-related health issues for city dwellers.
- **Cooling Centers:** Utilize designated cooling centers in your area during extreme heat events. These are often public buildings like libraries, community centers, and malls.
- **Urban Planning:** Cities are starting to implement more green spaces and reflective materials to mitigate the urban heat island effect. However, individual actions like planting trees and using reflective roofing materials can also help.

URINE COLOUR CHART

