

UW Health: Summer heat can be dangerous; know the signs and how to be safe outside

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MADISON, Wis. – Hot summer weather draws people to the beach or swimming pool, but it also presents dangers that can sneak up quickly.

Between 2004 and 2018, 702 people died of heat-related deaths in the United States, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Last year in Wisconsin seven people died, 689 people went to emergency departments and 67 people were hospitalized due to overexposure, according to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services. Emergency department visits were highest among people 15 to 34 years old, and hospitalizations were most frequent among those age 65 and older.

Wisconsin weather forecasts for the next several days predict temperatures of 90 degrees Fahrenheit or more, and the public should take care when traveling or spending time outdoors, according to Rishelle Eithun, manager, Child Health Advocacy Program, UW Health.

“Summer is a time we all like to get outside for leisure, but we have to plan ahead,” she said. “Even a trip to the store can be dangerous when it’s extremely hot.”

The temperature in a vehicle can rise to deadly levels in minutes, so it’s critical to not leave children, the elderly or pets unattended in a car, Eithun said.

“Unfortunately, caregivers can forget their little ones are with them in the car when they run an errand or when they get home, leaving them in the vehicle and in a potentially dangerous situation,” she said.

Eithun recommends making plans to ensure kids are never left alone in a car, and checking on friends and relatives who are older, don't have air conditioning, or live alone, during hot weather events to make sure they are safe.

For people heading outside in hot temperatures, there are a few things you can do to stay safe and cool:

- Drink plenty of water throughout the day
- Avoid alcohol or heavy meals
- A cool shower or bath can help bring your body temperature down quickly
- Avoid going outside during the hottest parts of the day if you can
- Watch for signs of overheating, including dizziness, nausea, feeling weak or muscle cramps

A UW Health trauma expert is available for interviews today. The Trauma Center at UW Health is one of two American College of Surgeons Verified Level I Trauma Centers for adults and pediatrics in Wisconsin, allowing it to treat the most seriously injured patients. It is also the state's only American Burn Association verified burn unit for adults and pediatrics.