



St. Mary's County Health Department

NEWS RELEASE

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HEALTH DEPARTMENT RECOMMENDS ACTIONS IN CASE OF HEAT EMERGENCY

LEONARDTOWN, MD. (June 30, 2010) – According to the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH), the recent heat wave has contributed to five Maryland deaths in the past week. All victims were senior citizens (65 and over) with underlying conditions and, with the exception of one resident, were found indoors without air conditioning.

“These deaths remind us how important it is to take precautions against harsh weather conditions such as the heat wave we are currently experiencing in our state,” said Governor Martin O’Malley. “We need to be mindful of our families, friends and neighbors and take the time to check on those who may need extra assistance.”

The St. Mary’s County Health Department cautions citizens that hyperthermia can develop from the hot and humid conditions typically associated with Maryland summers. Symptoms of heatstroke may include dry red skin, convulsions, disorientation, delirium and coma. Treatment of heatstroke involves the rapid lowering of body temperature, using a cool bath or wet towels. Emergency medical care should be obtained by dialing 9-1-1.

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Signs of heat exhaustion, a milder form of heatstroke, may include extreme weakness, muscle cramps, nausea, headache, vomiting or fainting. Heat exhaustion is treated with plenty of liquids and rest in a cool, shaded area. Those on a low-sodium diet or with other health problems should contact a doctor.

“There are things that St. Mary’s County residents should do to be careful in hot weather,” said Dr. William B. Icenhower, health officer. “Chronic health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and respiratory illnesses increase the risk of heatstroke and heat exhaustion.”

Icenhower reminded citizens that the St. Mary’s County Department of Aging has a Heat Emergency Preparedness Plan in place for senior citizens in the event of a heat emergency. If deemed appropriate, local senior centers will extend hours to provide an air-conditioned environment for those considered at-risk. Anyone with concerns regarding heat-related medical questions should contact the St. Mary’s County Health Department at 301-475-4330.

Icenhower added that the following precautions should be taken during hot weather:

- Drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration;
- Wear loose-fitting, lightweight, and light-colored clothing;
- Avoid direct sunlight and wear sunscreen, a hat and sunglasses;
- When possible, stay in air-conditioned areas;
- NEVER leave young children or pets in a car, even with the windows cracked;
- Check on elderly relatives and neighbors at least daily; and
- Schedule outdoor physical activity during the morning or evening hours when the temperature is cooler.

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