



# HEATWAVE



## ACTION GUIDE



### HEATWAVES CAN KILL

Heatwaves are perhaps our most under-rated natural hazard. In Australia during the 20th century, heatwaves caused more deaths than any other natural hazard. In 1939 alone, a heatwave in southern Australia caused 438 deaths and seriously affected many thousands. Heatwaves also cause expensive livestock/crop losses and damage roads, electrical equipment, railways, bridges etc.

### HEAT STRESS AND THOSE MOST AT RISK

Every summer people suffer from heat stress when the body absorbs more heat than it can dispel (see '**Treatment**' - reverse side). **Prompt action** will avoid the potentially **fatal** effects of fully-developed **heat stroke**. At **most risk** are young children; the elderly; people with alcohol, weight, or health problems; or those on medication/drugs with a dehydrating effect. **Seek medical advice in such cases.**

### AVOIDING HEAT STRESS

- ◆ Wear lightweight, light-coloured, loose, porous natural fibre clothes. **Avoid** strenuous activities.
- ◆ Drink 2 to 3 litres of **water** per day, even if not thirsty.
- ◆ **Avoid** alcoholic, caffeinated or carbonated(soft) drinks.
- ◆ **Don't** take salt tablets unless prescribed by a doctor.
- ◆ **Avoid** heavy protein foods (eg meat, dairy products) which increase body heat and fluid loss.
- ◆ Keep your home **cool** with curtains, shutters, or awnings on the sunny sides and **open** windows **at night**.
- ◆ If you don't have air conditioning, use **fans**, **damp clothing** and have frequent **cool** showers.
- ◆ Spend as much time as possible in **air conditioned** buildings (eg shopping centres, galleries, museums).
- ◆ **Avoid** direct sunlight. Wear a hat and sunscreen as sunburn limits your ability to cope with heat.
- ◆ If you work outside, keep hat and clothing damp.
- ◆ **Don't** leave children or pets in parked vehicles.
- ◆ If you suffer chronic illness or feel ill, **see a doctor**.
- ◆ Keep animals in the **shade** with plenty of **water**.

*See over for information on Heat Stress symptoms and First Aid*



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## HEAT STRESS SYMPTOMS AND FIRST AID TREATMENT



DISORDER	SYMPTOMS	TREATMENT (First Aid)
UNUSUAL DISCOMFORT AND HEAT CRAMPS	Heavy sweating, tired and thirsty. Irritability, loss of appetite. Prickly heat rash, nausea. Muscle spasms/twitching, moist cool skin. Painful muscle cramps (limbs and abdomen).	Drink more water. Have a cold shower/bath. Lie in a cool place with legs supported and slightly elevated. Massage muscles gently to ease spasms, or firmly if cramped, then apply ice packs and drink glucose (eg cordial). <b>Don't have salt.</b>
HEAT EXHAUSTION	Profuse sweating. Cold, clammy, pale skin. Fatigue, weakness and restlessness. Headache and vomiting. Weak but rapid pulse. Poor co-ordination. Normal temperature, but faintness.	Lay victim down in a cool place as above, loosen clothing and apply wet cloths to head and body. Fan, or move victim to an air conditioned area. Give sips of cold water. If vomiting continues, <b>seek medical assistance immediately.</b>
HEAT STROKE (Hyperthermia)	Confusion, headache, nausea, dizziness. Skin flushed, hot and unusually dry. Dry swollen tongue. High body temperature (40°C +). Rapid strong pulse at first, then weaker. Deep unconsciousness may develop rapidly.	<b>Seek medical assistance urgently.</b> In the meantime: Lay victim in a cool place as above and remove outer clothing. If unconscious, check airway and breathing. Cool victim quickly, applying cold water, or wrap in a wet sheet and fan them (keep wet). When conscious, give sips of water.

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