HEAT AWARENESS

In preparation for the upcoming RAGBRAI event, the following material is provided as basic information on heat hazard awareness, common heat related illnesses and actions you can take to protect yourself. One of the first things to understand is just what is meant by having heat awareness? A common and easy way to think of this is in relation to the Heat Index, which is a system devised by the National Weather Service to alert the public and authorities to the hazards of heat and heat waves. The Heat Index is a measure of how hot it really feels when relative humidity is factored in with the actual air temperature and a Heat Index Chart provides guidance on the varying levels of caution and danger awareness we should take.

IMPORTANT: Since Heat Index values were devised for shady, light wind conditions, EXPOSURE TO FULL SUNSHINE CAN INCREASE HEAT INDEX VALUES BY UP TO 15°F. Also, STRONG WINDS, PARTICULARLY WITH VERY HOT, DRY AIR, CAN BE EXTREMELY HAZARDOUS. Additionally, the National Weather Service will initiate alert procedures as follows and these criteria may vary across the country, especially for areas that are not used to dangerous heat conditions but provide a good base line for understanding when they will be issued.

Excessive Heat Advisory—Take Action! A Heat Advisory is issued within 12 hours of the onset of extremely dangerous heat conditions with a general rule of thumb being the maximum heat index temperature is expected to be 100° or higher for at least 2 days, and nighttime air temperatures will not drop below 75°.

Excessive Heat Watches—Be Prepared! Heat Watches are issued when conditions are favorable for an excessive heat event in the next 24 to 72 hours and is used when the risk of a heat wave has increased but its occurrence and timing is still uncertain.

Excessive Heat Warning—Take Action! An Excessive Heat Warning is issued within 12 hours of the onset of extremely dangerous heat conditions with a general rule of thumb being the maximum heat index temperature is expected to be 105° or higher for at least 2 days and nighttime air temperatures will not drop below 75°.

Based on these heat hazard warnings, please determine your activities accordingly and take proactive heat wave safety tips to include the following. Slow down. Strenuous activities should be reduced, eliminated, or rescheduled to the coolest time of the day. Individuals at risk should stay in the coolest available place, not always necessarily indoors. Dress for summer as lightweight light-colored clothing reflects heat and sunlight, and helps your body maintain normal temperatures.

Put less fuel on your inner fires. Foods (like proteins) that increase metabolic heat production also increase water loss. Make sure to drink plenty of water or other non-alcohol fluids as your body needs water to keep cool. Drink plenty of fluids even if you don't feel thirsty. Persons who have epilepsy or heart, kidney, or liver disease, or are on fluid restrictive diets or have a problem with fluid retention should consult a physician before increasing their consumption of fluids. Do not drink alcoholic beverages. Do not take salt tablets unless specified by a physician and persons on salt restrictive diets should consult a physician before increasing their salt intake. Spend more time in air-conditioned places as this markedly reduces danger from the heat. Also, don't get too much sun as sunburn makes the job of heat dissipation that much more difficult.

One of the obvious problems during extremely hot and humid weather is our body's ability to cool itself is challenged. So, when our body heats too rapidly to cool itself off properly or when too much fluid or salt is lost through dehydration or sweating our body temperatures rise and we may experience a heat-related illness. The most common types of heat-related illness are Heat Cramps, Heat Exhaustion and Heat Stroke.

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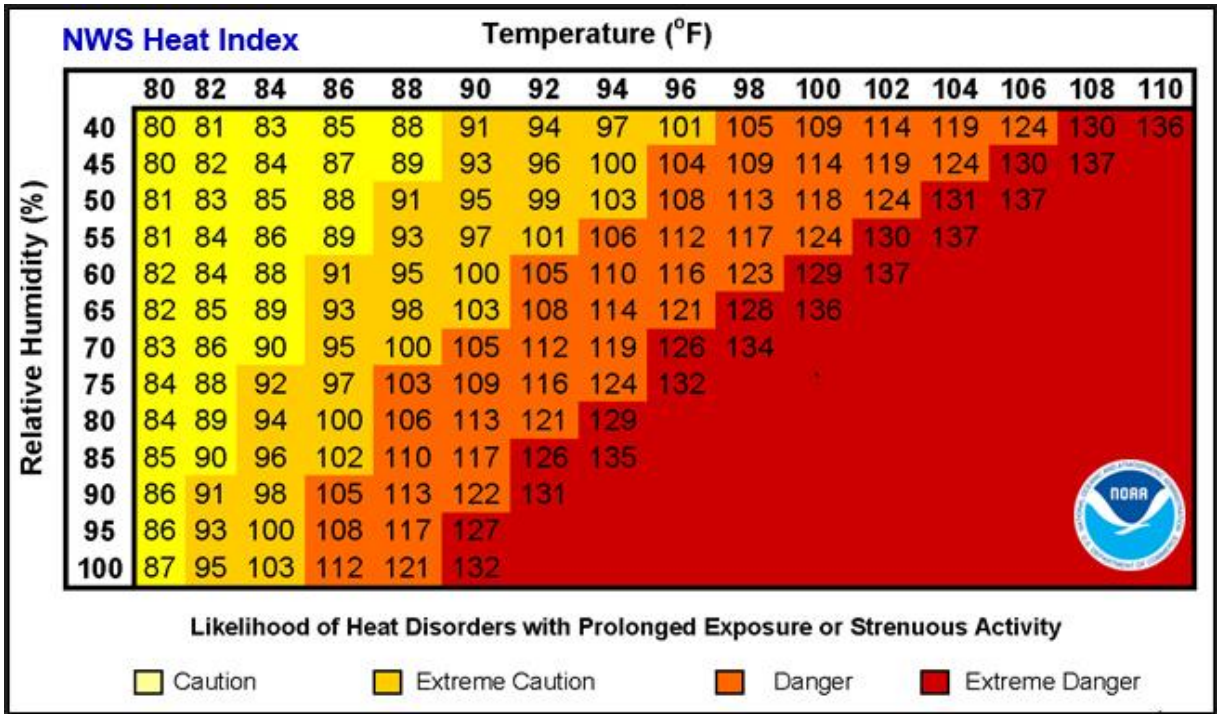
The following is more detailed information on each and some first aid steps to take if these illnesses take place:

Heat Cramps may be the first sign of heat-related illness and may lead to heat exhaustion or heat stroke. Symptoms include painful muscle cramps and spasms usually in legs and abdomen and heavy sweating. First aid includes applying firm pressure on cramping muscles or gently massaging to relieve spasm and providing the person sips of water unless they complain of nausea, then stop giving water.

Heat Exhaustion is the next common heat-related illness with symptoms including heavy sweating, weakness, cool, pal and clammy skin, a fast and weak pulse, possible muscle cramps, dizziness, nausea or vomiting and fainting. First aid includes moving the person to a cooler location followed by laying the person down and loosening clothing and applying cool, wet cloths to as much of the body as possible. You would then fan or move the victim to an air-conditioned room and offer sips of water. If the person vomits more than once, seek immediate medical attention. If in doubt, call 911.

Heat Stroke is the most serious heat-related illness and if untreated can result in death. Symptoms include an altered mental state with one or more of the following symptoms: throbbing headache, confusion, nausea, dizziness, or shallow breathing. Other symptoms include body temperature above 103°F, hot, red, dry, or moist skin, rapid and strong pulse and the person may faint, losing consciousness. Heat stroke is a severe medical emergency. Call 911 or get the victim to a hospital immediately as delay can be fatal. Move the victim to a cooler, preferably air-conditioned, environment and reduce body temperature with cool cloths or bath. Use a fan only if heat index temperatures are below the high 90s as a fan can make you hotter at higher temperatures. Most importantly do NOT give fluids.



Extreme Danger: Heat Stroke is likely. **Danger**: Sunstroke, muscle cramps, and/or heat exhaustion likely. Heatstroke possible with prolonged exposure and/or physical activity. **Extreme Caution**: Sunstroke, muscle cramps, and/or heat exhaustion possible with prolonged exposure and/or physical activity. **Caution**: Fatigue possible with prolonged exposure and/or physical activity.

All information was collected from the National Weather Service, American Red Cross, and Federal Emergency Management Agency.