

ER doc offers tips to stay cool during the heat wave and avoid a trip to the hospital



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The first extreme heat wave of the year is the hardest to weather

LOMA LINDA, CA – June 16, 2016 – Loma Linda University Medical Center (LLUMC) is prepped and ready for the possibility of an influx of patients as outdoor temperatures are anticipated to spike this weekend. However, emergency department physician and medical director Lea Walters, MD, is



offering advice and tips on surviving the heat wave to avoid a trip to the hospital.

“Throughout the summer, our bodies acclimatize to the hot weather,” said Walters. “For this reason, the first extreme spikes in heat every year affect people of all ages more severely than later in the summer.”

While seniors, children, and those living with chronic health conditions may develop symptoms earlier as temperatures rise, everyone, including seasoned athletes, is at risk. “I would advise against training during the hottest parts of the day,” she said, “and yet I often see cyclists and runners in the middle of the day.”

According to Walters, people who are taking blood pressure, allergy or psychiatric medication often don’t realize that high temperatures may impact them more.

Fortunately, there are several steps that can be taken to avoid heat stroke:

- Limit outdoor activity during the hottest part of the day; don’t try to be invincible.
- Stay out of the direct sun.
- Drink fluids; if you are sweating, drink fluids that contain electrolytes.
- Drink before you feel thirsty.
- Make use of air conditioning.
- If you begin to feel symptoms, shed layers of clothes; dampen a cloth and sit near a fan.
- Seek shelter where there is AC: if you don’t have it at home: shopping malls; grocery stores and the library are common cooling spots.
- In L.A., Orange, San Bernardino and Riverside counties, call 2-1-1 from any phone for a list of cooling center options. Tips: call the center in advance to make sure seating is available; if the center you want is at capacity, check online for additional centers.

Following these guidelines, as well as checking on elderly family members, neighbors and friends will help bring fewer patients with heat-related symptoms to the emergency department, which is a goal Walters and every emergency department physician hopes for.

To avoid heat stroke, Walters urges everyone to be watchful for symptoms including dehydration, headache, nausea and profuse sweating.

Severe heat exhaustion is life-threatening. Symptoms of severe heat exhaustion also include an increased heart rate, rapid breathing, flu-like symptoms such as fever with a temperature over 104

degrees, confusion and seizures. “Call 911 immediately if you suspect heat exhaustion,” Walters advised.

When patients arrive in the emergency department with symptoms of heat stroke, immediate steps are taken.

Heat stroke patients are cooled using external and possibly internal methods, started on IV fluids and may even need intubation [a tube inserted into the trachea], depending on how sick they are. “Cooling and fluid replacement are the priorities,” Walters added, “then supportive measures and treatment of any other abnormalities that are identified are taken.”

Walters urged that heat emergencies can be fatal. “Patients with severe ‘heat exhaustion,’ — for example dehydration with any electrolyte abnormalities or muscle breakdown — will be admitted to the hospital,” she cautioned. “Every heat stroke patient is admitted, probably to the intensive care unit.”

PHOTO CAPTION: Dr. Lea Walters poses for a photo at LLUMC’s emergency department, Thursday, June 16.