



# Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities



## Heat Stroke Alert



This Medical Alert is based on the work of the Medical Review Subcommittee and should be posted prominently. The Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities works to improve the services provided to people with disabilities by communicating important information found in the Medical Review Subcommittee's reviews of deaths and serious injuries. Thank you for promptly reporting deaths and serious injuries. You are helping us to meet our mission.

The heat and humidity put all people at risk for heat stroke or heat exhaustion. This Office has received reports of clients suffering and dying from heat stroke because they live in very hot buildings or because they made some choices that caused their body temperature to rise to very dangerous levels. Certain medications may also be a factor.

### **Recipients of mental health, developmental disabilities and chemical dependency treatment may be at added risk:**

- Because of living at a facility or other environment that has no air conditioning and/or poor air circulation.
- Because of the need to take medications that inhibit perspiration or increase fluid loss, such as diuretics, phenothiazines, anticholinergics, antihistamines, beta-blockers, benzodiazepines, amphetamines, neuroleptics (like Thorazine, Haldol, Prolixin, Navane), tricyclic antidepressants, cocaine, or alcohol.
- Because of being reluctant or unable to drink adequate amounts of non-caffeinated fluids.
- Because of the incapacity to make decisions that would reduce the risk, such as wearing appropriate summer clothing and eating light meals.

### **In order to reduce the risk, it becomes the responsibility of the facility and/or program staff to:**

- Keep the environment as cool as possible.
- Review restricted fluid intake programs and provide extra fluids, including water, milk, fruit juice or non-caffeinated soda at meal times.
- Encourage non-caffeinated fluid intake.
- Know what medications put clients at particular risk, such as neuroleptics and diuretics.
- Make rounds and observe conditions at regular intervals during the day in order to ensure the health and safety of clients.
- Review activities for their appropriateness during hot weather. When appropriate, reduce, suspend, or conduct the activities in cool places or during a cooler period of the day.
- Limit intake of caffeine and alcohol as they can increase fluid loss.

### **Signs and Symptoms of Heat Stroke:**

Warning signs vary but may include the following

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/elderlyheat.asp>

- An extremely high body temperature (above 103°F).
- Red, hot, and dry skin (with no sweating).
- Rapid, strong pulse.
- Throbbing headache.
- Dizziness.
- Nausea.

**Heat stroke is a medical emergency. Call 911.**

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May, 2011