NEW YORK STATE OF OPPORTUNITY. Office for People With Developmental Disabilities

Health and Safety Alert

Summer Safety – Summer Fun 2025

Related Document: https://opwdd.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2024/06/psa_drowning.pdf **.** Below are some reminders to ensure everyone is safe and healthy while enjoying the numerous activities that the summer weather allows. These tips provide general guidance to reduce the risk associated with summer conditions. Agency staff should still provide care specific to each person receiving services based on their individualized needs and circumstances.

Sun Safety

RISKS: Too much sun is unhealthy. It can cause sunburn to skin in as little as 15 minutes and increases the long-term risk of skin cancer and eye damage. Even on hazy or cloudy days, the sun's rays can be harmful.

PROTECTIONS FOR SUN EXPOSURE:

- Avoid direct exposure to the sun. Remain in the shade whenever possible.
- Use a broad-spectrum sunscreen with UVA/UVE protection of 30 SPF or greater. Apply at least 15- 30 minutes before sun exposure. Reapply frequently throughout the day (every 2 hours and more frequently when swimming/active). Don't forget the ears, feet, hands, and neck. Protect the lips with lip balm with SPF 15 or more.
- Wear UV protective sunglasses and a hat to protect eyes, ears, and head.
- Avoid being in the sun when the sun's rays are strongest, 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.
- Some medications cause people to be very sensitive to sun exposure, such as antihistamines, antibiotics, antipsychotics, antidepressants, cardiovascular drugs, or oral medications for diabetes. Staff must know who takes such medications and take any necessary precautions.
- Do your best to encourage sun safety when people receiving services are participating in activities (e.g., camp, family visits) without agency staff supervision by providing protective supplies and clothing.
- If a person appears to have sunburn, contact the RN for guidance (for those served in a certified setting). If blistering is apparent, contact the physician.
- Additional information is available from the American Cancer Society at the following link:
- Be Safe in the Sun | Sun and UV Exposure (cancer.org) https://www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/sun-and-uv.html

Prevent Heat-Related Illnesses

RISKS: People suffer heat-related illness when their bodies are unable to cool down, especially in high temperatures and high humidity. Heat-related illness can be dangerous and could result in serious health complications up to and including death.

PRECAUTIONS: **Heat related illnesses and deaths are preventable**

- Agencies should activate heat-related plans of action when external temperatures reach 80°F and continue with implementation as temperatures rise.

- Individualized person-centered plans may also be needed for people at greater risk or with specialized needs. This may include people on medications causing sun sensitivity and/or those who have difficulty recognizing or communicating signs and symptoms of illness.
- Training should be provided to staff in the prevention and recognition of heat-related illnesses.
- Be aware of outdoor temperatures and modify or reschedule outdoor activities accordingly.
- Provide activities in air-conditioned areas when possible and stay in the shade when outdoors.
- Encourage hydration by drinking plenty of water/caffeine free fluids and water-rich foods (e.g., watermelon, strawberries etc.).
- If someone requires physician-ordered fluid limitations, work with the RN and the physician to determine how to assist them in hot weather.
- Provide well-balanced, light meals.
- People receiving services should be encouraged to wear loose fitting, lightweight, and light-colored clothing.
- Help keep homes/buildings cool. Close windows and use window coverings (blinds, shades, drapes)
- Be aware that fans alone do not provide cooling—they only move hot air around.
- **Vehicles**: In as little as 10 minutes temperatures inside a parked vehicle can rapidly rise to a dangerous level (118° F or higher), with heat increasing as more time elapses.
- Do not leave people in a vehicle, even with windows down, no matter how brief.
- Establish a routine to be sure all occupants leave the vehicle when unloading. Check each seat for anyone who may be sleeping/reclining.

TYPES OF HEAT-RELATED ILLNESSES:

Heat Exhaustion – a milder form of heat-related illness. Heat exhaustion can lead quickly to heat stroke, so if symptoms worsen or don't improve, seek medical help immediately.

Signs and symptoms include:

- Heavy sweating, paleness, skin may feel cool;
- Muscle cramps, fatigue, weakness;
- Dizziness, headache, fainting, nausea or vomiting; and
- Pulse rate may be fast and weak, and breathing may be fast and shallow.

Heat Stroke – This is a **medical emergency**. When a person's body temperature rises to a dangerous level, it can lead to vital organ damage and death.

Signs and symptoms include:

- An extremely high body temperature (above 103 °F);
- Red, hot, dry skin and absence of sweating; and
- Rapid, strong pulse rate, throbbing headache, dizziness, nausea or vomiting.

IMMEDIATE STEPS TO TAKE:

- **Contact 911 immediately** if heat stroke is suspected or a person is exhibiting extreme symptoms of heat exhaustion.
- After contacting 911, get the person to a cool, shady area, and attempt to cool them down with cool water applied to the skin OR wrap ice packs in cloth and place on neck, wrists, ankles, and armpits. Monitor body temperature, if possible.
- Give fluids if person is alert and able to swallow. Have them sip slowly. Stop giving fluids if vomiting occurs.
- Seek medical follow-up for milder heat-related illness as soon as possible.

For more information, please visit: www.health.ny.gov/publications/1243/ and http://noheatstroke.org

Food Safety: Avoid Food Poisoning

RISKS: The USDA warns that food-borne illness (food poisoning) increases in summer months. Heat and humidity can cause harmful bacteria to quickly multiply on food.

PREVENTION: Follow these simple steps to safer food during summertime picnics and cookouts:

- **Wash hands often:** Have moist disposable towelettes handy to clean hands often.
- **Keep surfaces clean:** Unclean or contaminated surfaces are a prime cause of food-borne illness. Consider carrying soap and water or disinfectant cleaning wipes to use on surfaces when outside or at remote sites.
- **Separate and cook.** Keep raw meat juices away from ready-to-eat food. Cook meat thoroughly to kill bacteria. Use separate plates and utensils for raw meats to avoid cross contamination.
- **CHILL.** Keep cold foods cold. Food left unrefrigerated for more than two hours may not be safe to eat. When the temperature is above 90 °F, food should not be left out for more than one hour. **If you have any doubts, throw it out.**
- Refer to the guidance issued by the FDA at the following link: http://www.fda.gov/food/resourcesforyou/Consumers/ucm109899.htm

Protect Against Summertime Insects

RISKS: Insects such as mosquitoes and ticks can carry diseases, and their bites can cause skin irritation. In addition to being uncomfortable, some people are severely allergic to insect bites, especially bee and wasp stings.

PROTECTIONS: If you will be out at night or hiking in tall grasses or wooded areas, use an insect repellant and check skin and clothing for the presence of ticks. Seek medical attention if you or a person you support is bitten by a tick. If you/someone is allergic to any insect bites, remember to carry an allergy kit per their physician's recommendation.

Safe Practice Near Water & During Water Sports

RISKS: Wherever there is water, there is a risk of drowning. Drowning can occur in seconds. The following factors can contribute to a drowning accident:

- A medical condition such as a seizure disorder;
- A medical emergency while in the water, such as a heart attack, stroke or cramping;
- Use of alcohol or drugs, including prescribed medications.
- Water conditions, including calm or rough waves, temperature, clarity or hidden objects.

PROTECTIONS: **Always provide adequate supervision and follow these simple precautions to save lives!**

- Know each person's ability in the water before heading to the pool.
- Have policy and procedures in place at sites/programs that have a pool onsite.
- Make specific supervision assignments; one to one supervision should be provided to people with seizure disorders and diagnoses that can increase drowning risk (e.g., dysrhythmias).
- A level of supervision and/or swimming safeguards must be identified and should be documented in a person's Life Plan, Plan of Nursing Services (PONS), Staff Action Plan, or other plans of support for a person.
- Staff responsible for supervising people in the water must have the ability to immediately respond to the person while in the water. It is recommended that staff are able to swim when people they are supervising are in more than knee-deep water. Depending on the person's needs, it is best practice for staff to be in the water with the person to safely supervise them.
- Know the supervision and support equipment needs for the people receiving services during water

activities. When possible, swimming areas that are less crowded should be considered over other swimming areas, as it will allow for easier supervision.

- Swim in familiar waters where lifeguards are present, when available. Observe all rules of the swimming areas.
- Watch for a person being too tired, too cold, too far from safety, getting to much sun, or doing too much strenuous activity.
- Be responsive to and anticipate changing conditions. If a storm is approaching, get out of the water.
- Communicate with lifeguards regarding the needs of people receiving services; e.g., ask lifeguards if the swimming area poses any special risks.
- Before entering the water, assess clarity and temperature of the water, weather conditions, and potential for overcrowding of the area.
- Call/Signal for help at the first sign of trouble.
- Staff must be specifically assigned to people requiring supervision and must maintain visual contact at all times with the people for whom they are responsible.
- Supervisors should assess each staff member's ability to respond to water safety needs.
- Always wear a Coast Guard-approved personal flotation device (PFD) when boating. PFDs must be properly sized and maintained to be effective.
- Review Important Information About Drowning Alert (May 2024) which can be found at: https://opwdd.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2024/06/psa_drowning.pdf

Grill Safety: The Key to Successful Cookouts

Enjoy the outdoor grilling that summer allows but be sure grilling is done safely and with safe equipment. General Grilling Safety Alert (January 2020) which can be found at: https://opwdd.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2020/02/general-grilling-safety-hsa-1-2020.pdf