

MEDIA RELEASE

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Summer sun poses health risks for Darling Downs residents

HEALTH care workers are reminding residents to be mindful of their health with the region having already experienced higher than average summer temperatures.

Darling Downs Hospital and Health Service Public Health Director Doctor Penny Hutchinson said hot weather could lead to dehydration, sunburn and other more serious heat-related illnesses.

“Heat stroke occurs when a person’s core body temperature becomes high and doesn’t cool down,” Dr Hutchinson said.

“It can be quite serious, leading to unconsciousness and even death.”

The condition can be caused by not drinking enough water, spending too much time in the sun and not being able to cool down quickly.

“All Queenslanders are at risk during periods of hot or prolonged high temperatures, but some people are at a higher risk of harm, such as the elderly, especially those who live alone, babies and very young children, pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers, as well as those who are physically active, such as manual workers or people who play sport.

“Some of the symptoms of heat-related illness include dizziness, headaches, bright or dark urine which indicates possible dehydration, nausea or vomiting, and fainting.

“In extreme cases, heat stroke can lead to confusion or slurred speech, a rapid pulse, vomiting and diarrhoea, and a loss of consciousness.

“If this occurs, it is important to call triple zero (000) as soon as possible.”

Dr Hutchinson also believes it is important to remember sun safety messages in the summer months.

“It’s important to wear a hat, keep out of the sun between 10am and 2pm, wear long sleeves and light clothing and apply sunscreen,” she said.

What is heat related illness?

- The body normally cools itself by sweating. In some situations, sweating isn’t enough and body temperature rises. This can be associated with different effects ranging from a mild heat rash or cramps through to heat exhaustion or the more severe and potentially fatal heat stroke.
- People can experience heat-related illness during periods of extreme heat in summer. It can also occur in athletes or others during periods of physical exertion.

How to prevent a heat-related illness:

- Drink plenty of fluids; cool water is best. Don't wait until you are thirsty to drink, instead drink regularly throughout the day.
- Urine colour is a good guide to hydration. It should be clear to light straw-coloured, not dark or gold.
- Stay indoors in very hot weather, preferably in an air-conditioned building or ensure there is good airflow with fans and open windows.
- Public venues, such as air-conditioned shopping centres and pools, can provide refuge from the heat.
- People can also stay cool by taking cool showers or baths, soaking their feet in a basin of water or wetting a bandana or washer and wrapping it around their neck.
- Take time to adjust to the environment, pace yourself and limit strenuous outdoor activity where possible.

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