



# Extreme heat – health advice

## Older children and teenagers

As children's and teenager's bodies are smaller in size and weight to adults, these differences mean that they absorb heat rapidly in hot conditions and are at greater risk of suffering from heat-related illness.

### Particular risks

Children and teenagers are especially at risk in the heat as:

- they adjust more slowly than adults to rising temperatures
- they produce more heat with activity than adults do
- they sweat less than adults prior to puberty as the sweating mechanism is poorly developed and this makes it harder for them to cool off
- they often do not drink enough fluids while playing, exercising, or participating in sports
- those with chronic health problems or those who are taking certain medications could be more susceptible to heat-related problems, as well as those who have had a recent illness that caused vomiting and diarrhoea, or a previous heat-related illness
- overweight children or those who dress in heavier clothing (required for sport or other special activities) are also more susceptible to heat.

### Drinking

- It is important that children and teenagers drink lots of water. Do not give them caffeinated drinks as these can increase dehydration.
- If they have difficulty drinking plenty of water, then other drinks (for example, sports drinks) might need to be given, although water is the best option.
- Make sure your child has a bottle of water with them at all times if outside.



### Clothing and other protective items

- Light-coloured, lightweight and loose-fitting clothing should be worn.
- Clothing with an ultraviolet protective factor (UPF) reduces the risk of sunburn. UPF 50+ is recommended.
- A wide-brimmed hat (at least 7.5cm wide), or a legionnaire or bucket-style hat should be worn. Make sure it shades the face, neck and ears. Caps do not offer enough sun protection and are not recommended.
- Broad-spectrum sunscreen is a must when playing outdoors (at least SPF30+). It should be applied 20 minutes before exposure to the sun, and re-applied every two hours, especially when spending time in the water.
- Sunglasses are recommended when outdoors.
- A small backpack is useful for children to carry items they need – water, hat, sunglasses, sunscreen and a small towel or flannel to wet and cool themselves with.

## Outdoor activities

- If an organised sporting event is scheduled on an extremely hot day, consider cancelling or postponing the event until the hot weather has passed.
- Limit outdoor activities (and indoor activities if the environment is also hot) in extremely hot weather.
- Make sure your child knows what to do if they feel unwell when in the heat, and especially if they are away from home. They need to:
  - stop playing, move to a cooler place, sit down in a shady spot if they can and drink water
  - tell someone quickly how they feel, without being upset or embarrassed about doing so.
- If your child plays sport, tell their coach about any physical conditions they have that may be made worse by the heat, and if your child has a history of heat-related illness. Provide your emergency contact details to your child's coach.
- Children and teenagers should not be forced to continue playing sport or exercise if they appear distressed, or complain about feeling unwell.
- Breaks should be taken every 15 to 30 minutes during outdoor activities to have a drink, or to wet themselves down.
- Drinking 2-3 cups (500-750 ml) of cool water per hour is usually sufficient for most sports.

## Heat effects

- Children and teenagers who sweat a lot, or have a high concentration of salt in their sweat, may be more likely to get muscle cramps or spasms during outdoor activities. This can largely be avoided by:
  - getting them used to the heat and humidity slowly before being involved in outdoor activities or sporting events
  - ensuring they eat and drink properly during hot periods.
- If heat exhaustion is suspected:
  - move the child or teenager to a cool place to lie down and rest
  - remove excess clothing immediately
  - get them to take plenty of small sips of water
  - put cool cloths, cold water or ice packs on their skin to cool them down
  - ensure they take it easy for the rest of the day.

**If a child or teenager's condition gets worse, either call a doctor (GP), take them to the Emergency Department of the nearest hospital OR call 000 for an ambulance if their condition appears serious.**

For more information, visit [www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/peh/alerts/standing\\_health\\_alerts/extreme\\_heat](http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/peh/alerts/standing_health_alerts/extreme_heat)