Health Officials Warn Residents to Be Careful of Heat-Related Illnesses While Cleaning Up Storm Debris

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September 1, 2012

State of Louisiana News Desk #:

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Many Louisiana residents will spend this weekend outdoors, cleaning up debris from Hurricane Isaac, and the Department of Health and Hospitals reminds them to take precautions against heat stroke.

Now that the storm has passed, many people are anxious to clean up around their properties and tend to their homes, said DHH Secretary Bruce D. Greenstein. We want them to be aware that, with weather like we are having now, when you stay outdoors for extended periods of time, doing physical work, you are at risk for heat stroke. This will be an even bigger concern for people who are still lacking power and have no air conditioning to cool off when they come indoors. Don't make yourself sick - drink lots of water, dress appropriately and take frequent breaks.

Also called sunstroke or heat illness, heat stroke is a serious condition that can be life threatening. If you are heading outdoors to do cleanup work, you can lower your risk of heat stroke by wearing light-colored loose-fitting clothing, drinking plenty of water, and resting often. Sunscreen and sun blocks are also a must. Before going outside, remember to stay indoors during the hottest part of the day, usually 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.

If you sense the symptoms of heat stroke - headache, nausea, dizziness, heat rash, loss of appetite and confusion - stop and rest in a cool place. If possible, take off your clothing and wet your skin with cool water. If the person's condition worsens, call 911 or seek medical attention immediately.

Officials also advise you to stay out of the sun and stay cool. Drinking plenty of water is important, not just from thirst. You may also drink fruit juices, milk and sports drinks, but avoid alcoholic beverages.

Heat-related illnesses:

- Heat cramps - muscle aches and cramps usually occur during long periods of hard work in a warm environment and are often associated with excessive fluid loss and salt loss.
- Heat exhaustion - usually happens when you are exposed to high heat and humidity for a long period of time. People also tend to heat exhaustion when they do not drink enough water.
- Heat stroke - a medical emergency which usually takes place when a person's body temperature gets too high. Heat stroke can be life threatening and requires medical treatment immediately.

Health officials at the Department of Health and Hospitals recommend drinking plenty of fluids to avoid heat-related illnesses. Heat stroke, with an extremely high body temperature, usually results in unconsciousness, and it's possibly a life-threatening condition.

If you have questions regarding heat-related illnesses, please call the Department of Health and Hospitals Hotline at 225.544.4741.