

Heat Reactions

There are three main reactions to an extremely hot environment. All three are caused by excessive loss of water through sweating.

Heatstroke or Sunstroke

Symptoms

- hot, flushed skin
- high fever (at least 105°F, or 40.6°C)
- not sweating
- delirium or unconsciousness
- shock (low blood pressure).

First aid

- Call your child's health care provider IMMEDIATELY.
- The high fever can be a life-threatening emergency. Cool your child off as rapidly as possible. Move him to a cool place. Sponge him with cool water (as cold as is tolerable), and fan him. If your child is unconscious, immersion in cold water could be life-saving. Note: Ibuprofen (Advil) or acetaminophen (Tylenol) will not help.
- If your child is conscious, give him a glass of cold water to drink every 15 minutes until he feels better.
- Call for emergency transportation.

Heat Exhaustion

Symptoms

- cold, pale skin
- no fever (temperature less than 100°F, or 37.8°C)
- sweating
- dizziness
- fainting
- weakness.

First aid

- Call your child's health care provider IMMEDIATELY.
- Put your child in a cool place. Have him lie down with his feet elevated.
- Give your child a glass of cold water to drink every 15 minutes until he feels better.
- Your health care provider will probably want to examine your child's state of hydration. After 2 or 3 glasses of water, you can drive in. Continue to offer your child water during the ride.

Heat Cramps

Symptoms

- severe cramps in the limbs and abdomen
- no fever.

Heat Reactions

Home care

Heat cramps are the most common reaction to excessive heat. They are never serious. Give your child a glass of cold water to drink every 15 minutes until he feels better. Children with heat cramps do not need to be seen by a health care provider.

Prevention

When your child is working or exercising in a hot environment, have him drink extra fluids. Avoid salt tablets because they slow down the absorption of water. Light-colored, lightweight clothing will help keep your child cooler.

Written by B.D. Schmitt, M.D., author of "Your Child's Health," Bantam Books.

This content is reviewed periodically and is subject to change as new health information becomes available. The information is intended to inform and educate and is not a replacement for medical evaluation, advice, diagnosis or treatment by a healthcare professional.