



# Fort Carson-MEDDAC News

## Heat Illness Season is Upon Us

By: Lindsay L. Huse, RN, Nurse Epidemiologist  
EACH Preventive Medicine

Warmer weather means it's time for picnics, barbeques, and baseball. It also heralds the beginning of heat illness season. Heat illnesses not only take the fun out of warm weather activities, they also undermine the mission and readiness of the Army. Heat illnesses include conditions such as heat exhaustion and heat stroke. These can occur when an individual is exposed to prolonged heat, especially if that individual is exerting him or herself physically during exposure. Heat injuries are most common when the temperature exceeds 75 degrees Fahrenheit and with moderate to high humidity. In 2010, the Army reported 207 cases of heat stroke and more than 1,500 cases of other heat injuries. One case of heat stroke was fatal. While most of these cases occurred on Army installations in the southern United States, the threat at Fort Carson is significant. Heat injuries can and do occur here.

While performing work in a hot and humid environment sets the stage for developing heat illness, other variables can play a part. Poor physical fitness, being overweight or obese, dehydration, other illness, and the use of some medications can make a person more prone to a heat illness. Ideally, a person who is expected to work in a hot and humid environment should first be well-hydrated and acclimated to the heat. Frequent rest breaks may be needed and fluids should be taken regularly. Commanders and leaders should always be alert to both the environment and the Soldiers' activities in it. They need to ensure adequate rest and fluids are available. Soldiers are encouraged to monitor their battle buddies to ensure they are drinking and urinating regularly, and that they don't begin to show signs of mental status changes such as confusion or disorientation.

Prevention is the best way to avert the threat, but early recognition of symptoms and quick treatment can mean the difference between a mild illness and a severe, even life-threatening, heat injury. Early signs of heat illness include sunburn, heat rash, swelling of hands and feet, exhaustion, muscle cramps and fainting, nausea, vomiting, and dizziness. Without treatment and with further exposure, a person may experience decreased mental status/confusion, muscle break-down, and eventually damage to the central nervous system and other organs. This severe form is heat stroke and it can be fatal if not treated quickly.

If a person is suspected to have a heat illness, it is important to cool and hydrate the individual as quickly as possible. Excess clothing should be removed and allow the individual to rest and drink, preferably in the shade. While removal from heat and



rehydrating is often enough for recovery, iced sheets or cool baths can be used as well if they are readily available. Anyone who has suffered a heat illness should be closely monitored because they are at an increased risk of developing it again in the future. While minor heat illnesses can be treated effectively in the field, if a person continues to show signs of heat illness or appears to be getting worse, transport to the nearest hospital is needed.

Because of the importance of heat injuries to the Army, these conditions are reportable in accordance with Army Regulation 40-5, Preventive Medicine. On Fort Carson, any cases of heat injury that require medical attention should be reported by the care provider as soon as possible to Preventive Medicine at 719-526-7353.

For further information on heat illness, visit the Army Public Health Command website at <http://phc.amedd.army.mil/topics/discond/hipss/Pages/HeatInjuryPrevention.aspx>. If your unit is interested in scheduling a briefing on preventing heat injuries, this can be scheduled by calling 719-526-2939. Prevention is the best defense against heat illnesses. Keep yourself and your fellow soldiers healthy and safe, and enjoy the summer season illness-free!