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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE 07/29/2010**

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## **Health Officer warns hot weather poses threat to health**

GRANT COUNTY, WA – With temperatures expected to remain high, Grant County Health District is cautioning residents and vacationers that getting too hot can make you sick. The people who are at highest risk are the elderly, the very young, and people with chronic diseases and mental illness. However even young and healthy people can get sick from the heat if they participate in physical activities during hot weather. “We understand many people are eager to enjoy the dry hot weather,” says Grant County Health Officer Alexander Brzezny, MD. “Unfortunately, too many people underestimate the health risks posed by the heat.”

**Heat stroke** is the most serious heat-related illness. It can lead to death. It occurs when the body becomes unable to control its temperature: the body's temperature rises rapidly, the body loses its ability to sweat, and is unable to cool down. Body temperatures can rise to 106°F or higher within 10 to 15 minutes. Warning signs vary but may include the following:

- An extremely high body temperature (above 103°F)
- Red, hot, and dry skin (no sweating)
- Rapid, strong pulse
- Throbbing headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea

**Heat exhaustion** is a milder form of heat-related illness that can develop after several days of exposure to high temperatures and inadequate or unbalanced fluid replacement. Warning signs vary, but may include the following:

- Heavy sweating
- Paleness
- Muscle Cramps
- Tiredness
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Nausea or vomiting
- Fainting
- Cool and moist skin
- Fast and weak pulse rate
- Fast and shallow breathing

“It’s important during the summer season to take precautions in the sun,” says Dr. Brzezny. “You can take these steps to prevent heat-related illnesses during the hot weather.”

- Stay cool indoors or in a shady place.
- Drink plenty of fluids but avoid alcohol and caffeine.
- Replace salt and minerals.
- Wear light-colored and lightweight clothing, use hat with a wide brim, and apply sunscreen with SPF 50 or higher.
- Schedule outdoor activities carefully, usually before 10am or after 4pm.
- Pace yourself carefully.
- Use a buddy system to check on each other.
- Monitor people at high risk.
- Never leave children in cars, even for a brief period.
- Use common sense and seek medical attention immediately if experiencing signs of heat illness.

If you have elderly relatives or neighbors, you can help them protect themselves from heat-related stress:

- Visit older adults at risk at least twice a day and watch them for signs of heat exhaustion or heat stroke.
- Encourage them to increase their fluid intake by drinking cool, nonalcoholic beverages regardless of their activity level. Warning: If their doctor generally limits the amount of fluid they drink or they are on water pills, they will need to ask their doctor how much they should drink while the weather is hot.
- Take them to air-conditioned locations if they have transportation problems.

If you see any signs of severe heat stress, you may be dealing with a life-threatening emergency.

- Have someone call for immediate medical assistance while you begin cooling the affected person.
- Get the person to a shady area.
- Cool the person rapidly, using whatever methods you can. For example, immerse the person in a tub of cool water; place the person in a cool shower; spray the person with cool water from a garden hose; sponge the person with cool water; or if the humidity is low, wrap the person in a cool, wet sheet and fan them vigorously.
- Monitor body temperature and continue cooling efforts until the body temperature drops to 101°–102°F.
- Do not give the person alcohol to drink.

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