

ANDREW J. SPANO, Westchester County Executive
JOSHUA LIPSMAN, M.D., J.D., M.P.H., Commissioner of Health
SUSAN TOLCHIN, Director of Communications

CONTACT: CAREN HALBFINGER

(914) 813-5013

(914) 813-5000 (After Hours)

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 8, 2008

HEALTH DEPARTMENT ISSUES HEAT & AIR QUALITY ADVISORY

With hot and humid weather forecast for the next few days, the Westchester County Health Department is issuing a heat advisory. Residents are advised to avoid strenuous activity, drink plenty of non-alcoholic non-caffeinated fluids, and take precautions against suffering heat-related illness. The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation has also issued an ozone advisory for today. Ozone levels are forecast to be in the "Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups" category in the New York Metropolitan area, which includes Westchester County.

Heat stroke is a serious and life-threatening condition that claims many lives nationwide each year. Symptoms include hot, dry skin; shallow breathing; a rapid, weak pulse; and confusion. Anyone suffering from heat stroke needs to receive emergency medical treatment immediately.

"Heat stroke and dehydration can take you by surprise," said Dr. Joshua Lipsman, Westchester County Commissioner of Health. "The elderly, young children and those with high blood pressure, heart disease, or lung conditions need to be especially careful to avoid heat-related illnesses."

The Health Department recommends the following preventive measures against heat-related illnesses:

- Drink more fluids (nonalcoholic), regardless of your activity level. Don't wait until you're thirsty to drink. If you must exercise, drink two to four glasses of cool, nonalcoholic fluids each hour. A sports beverage can replace the salt and minerals you lose in sweat.
- Do not drink liquids that contain caffeine, alcohol or large amounts of sugar - these actually cause you to lose more body fluid. Also, avoid very cold drinks, because they can cause stomach cramps.

MORE

- Stay indoors, ideally, in an air-conditioned place. If your house or apartment isn't air-conditioned, try spending a few hours at the shopping mall, public library or even the grocery store. A few hours spent in air conditioning can help your body stay cooler when you go back into the heat.
- Take a cool shower or bath and reduce or eliminate strenuous activities during the hottest time of the day.
- Wear lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing to reflect heat and sunlight.
- Protect yourself from the sun by wearing a wide-brimmed hat (also keeps you cooler) and sunglasses and by putting on sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher.
- NEVER leave anyone - a person or animal - in a closed, parked vehicle. This is life threatening.
- Neighbors should check on elderly residents in their area or apartment complex to make sure they are safe.
- Bring pets inside and be sure to provide them with plenty of water.

Ozone is a gas produced by the action of sunlight on organic air contaminants from automobile exhausts and other sources. “Significant exposure to ozone in the air has been linked with adverse health effects,” said Dr. Lipsman. “These may include nose and throat irritation, respiratory symptoms, and decreases in lung function.”

People experiencing such symptoms should speak with a health care provider. Those who may be especially sensitive to the effects of ozone exposure include the very young, those who exercise outdoors or are involved in strenuous outdoor work, and those with pre-existing respiratory problems such as asthma. When ozone levels are elevated, the Westchester County Department of Health recommends limiting strenuous physical activity outdoors to reduce the risk of adverse effects.

For more information and tips of safety during hot weather, residents should visit the Health Department website at www.westchestergov.com/health or call the Health Department’s **Stay Cool line at (914) 813-5620**.