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Experts Warn of Health Risks Associated with Medications and Extreme Heat

Combining Medications and Hot Weather can be Deadly

(Chicago) – Experts in pharmacology and toxicology at the Illinois Poison Center (IPC) warn the public about the health risks associated with taking certain medications during extreme heat conditions. Doing so can reduce a person’s ability to respond properly to heat and can lead to dehydration, heat stress and, in the most severe cases, death.

Individuals using medications, including those used to treat heart conditions, allergies, diarrhea and stomach cramps, should speak with a pharmacist or physician to see if these medicines increase the risk of heat-related illnesses.

Extreme heat in Illinois is defined as above 97 degrees Fahrenheit. However, individuals respond differently to heat and poison center experts urge people to use medications with caution during the warm-weather months.

“Many medications reduce a body’s ability to sweat, which prevents the body from cooling properly and can lead to a serious heat-related illness,” said Tony Burda, an expert in pharmacology and chief specialist in poison information for the Illinois Poison Center.

Infants and children up to four years of age, people 65 years of age and older, people who are overweight, and people who are ill or on certain medications are at greatest risk.

The following medications increase a person’s risk of a heat-related illness during hot weather:

- Anticholinergics
- Antihistaminics
- Antiparkinsonians/antispasmodics
- Antipsychotic drugs
- Beta-blockers
- Calcium-channel blockers
- Diuretics

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Add One – Heat and Medication Dangers

Symptoms of health-related illness or heat stroke

People should seek immediate medical attention if they experience one or more of the following symptoms:

- Extremely high fever – above 103° F
- Hot, dry skin
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Vomiting

Staying safe during extreme heat events

- If working or playing sports outside, take frequent breaks in cooler, shaded areas.
- Drink large quantities of fluids, even if no longer thirsty.
- Avoid caffeinated and alcoholic beverages. Instead, drink water or sports drinks.
- Wear cool, light-colored clothing.
- Check up regularly on those who may be isolated and at risk for heat-related illness, such as the elderly and mentally ill.

Illinois residents should call the Illinois Poison Center at 1-800-222-1222 with any questions or concerns regarding their medications, such as side effects, dosing errors and drug interactions.

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Editor's Note: Tony Burda and other poison experts are available for news media interviews. Contact IPC public affairs at 312-906-6146 to arrange an interview.

The Illinois Poison Center serves all of Illinois – 24 hours a day, 365 days a year – via a national, toll-free number, 1-800-222-1222. Staffed by pharmacists, physicians, nurses and poison information providers, the IPC provides poison prevention information and treatment advice on household products, medication issues, alcohol and drug misuse, bites and stings and other poisonings.

The IPC is a program of the Metropolitan Chicago Healthcare Council, an association comprising more than 140 hospitals and health care organizations working together to improve the delivery of health care services in the Chicago area.