



## **SUMMER IS HERE AND WOW! IT'S REALLY HOT. WHAT CAN WE DO TO STAY COOL AND SAFE?**

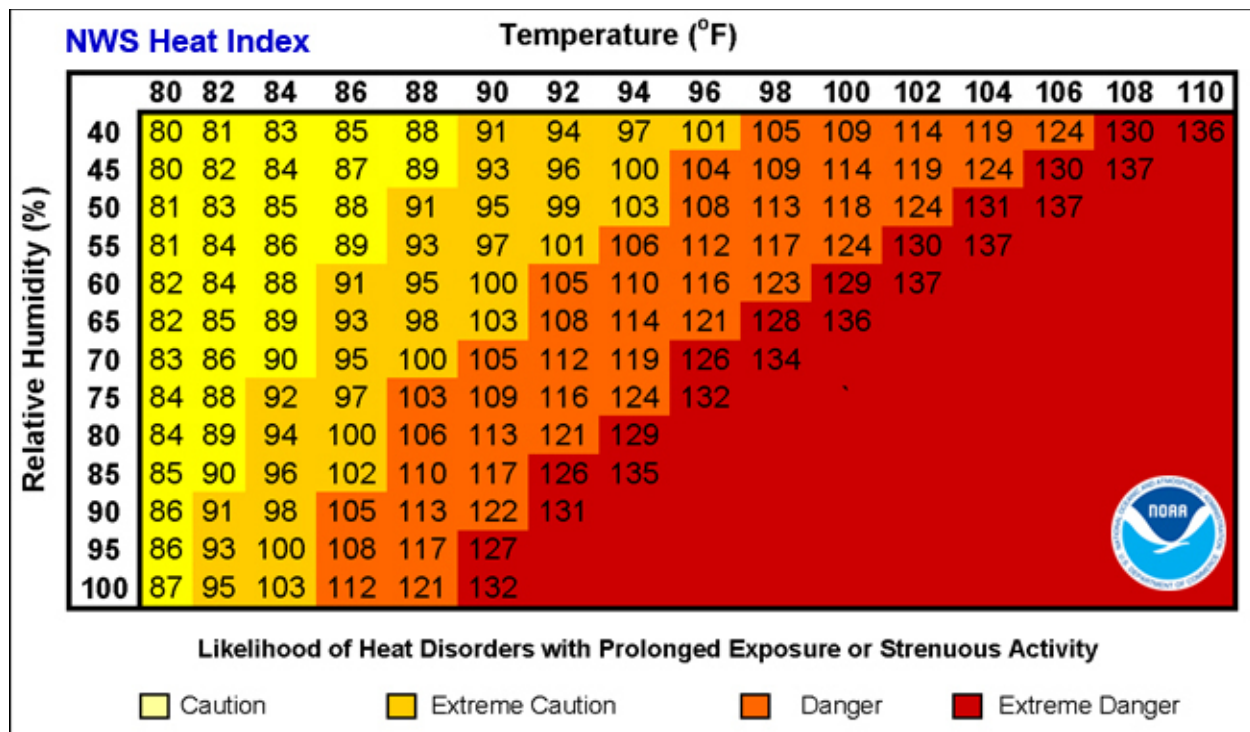
The first thing you can do is be aware of heat and the risk it can pose to health and safety. The Fund is so concerned about the heat that we issued a Risk alert for "Extreme Early Heat" in May of 2024. The National Weather Service had forecast extremely hot conditions for Memorial Day weekend that year.

TCRMF members working for Community Centers benefit from air conditioning in their facilities but that's not where all of the work takes place. IDD workers often take their residents to parks or on field trips during the summer. Case workers are also out visiting their clients in their homes or sitting in hot cars writing notes.

As Mark Twain once said, "Everybody talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it." So, Fund members, here is what you can do about heat, especially if you are working outside. As the first sentence of this article states, awareness of the heat is an important first step. If you know that it's going to be a hot, humid day you can dress appropriately in light colored clothing and wear a hat that reduces direct sunlight and shades the face and neck from sunburn. Work schedules can be adjusted so work can start earlier and end earlier. For instance, start work at 7:00 and end at 3:30 with a 30-minute lunch break. The workday will end at the hottest time of day and avoids another hour and a half of serious heat.

While working in the heat staying hydrated is very important. Drink plenty of water and take breaks from the heat, preferably out of the direct sun and in the shade. TCRMF members should be especially vigilant for their IDD clients as they may not tolerate the heat as well and may need reminding to drink water and let staff know if they're getting too hot. Having a place to cool off is especially important for this group. Regular meals and snacks are also important since they help your body replenish salt and electrolytes. Consider cancelling outings when it is extremely hot. Go to a museum instead.

Humidity is a complicating factor because it reduces the cooling effect of sweat evaporation on the skin. A combination of heat and humidity raises the threat of heat to anyone out in it. Even relatively low temperatures, like 90 degrees can be dangerous when combined with high humidity. The following chart shows how heat and humidity combine to increase discomfort and threat to human health:



<https://www.weather.gov/ama/heatindex>

Supervisors should monitor their employees or IDD clients for signs of heat illness that can come on rapidly during exertion in high heat and humidity. Co-workers should also be aware of their fellow workers' conditions, especially for new employees or those who have been off work for a while.

Common heat related illnesses, their symptoms, and basic first aid include the following:

- **Heat Stroke** is the most serious heat related illness and can cause death or permanent disability. It occurs when the body loses its ability to shed heat. When this happens the body's temperature rises rapidly. Symptoms include:
  - Hot, dry skin or profuse sweating
  - Hallucinations
  - Chills
  - Throbbing headache
  - Slurred speech
  - High body temperature
  - Confusion or dizziness

First Aid for Heat Stroke: Call 911 then move the worker out of the heat and direct sunlight and begin cooling by soaking clothes with water or spraying, sponging, or showering them with water and fanning their body. If available, move them into air conditioned space. If out in the field, make sure the first responders know how to find where you're working so unnecessary delays don't occur. GPS coordinates may be the best way to locate a remote location.

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- **Heat Exhaustion** is the body's response to excessive loss of water and salt through sweating. Older workers and those with high blood pressure are more susceptible to heat exhaustion. Symptoms include:
  - Heavy sweating
  - Extreme weakness or fatigue
  - Confusion or dizziness
  - Nausea
  - Clammy, moist skin
  - Pale or flushed complexion
  - Muscle cramps
  - Fast and shallow breathing

First aid for heat exhaustion includes moving the worker to a cooler, preferably air conditioned space. Have them drink plenty of cool water, sports drinks, or other non-alcoholic beverages and if available, have them take a cool shower or bath. Monitor for worsening symptoms and be prepared to seek medical aid.

- **Heat cramps and heat syncope** are other heat related illnesses. Heat cramps usually occur in leg, arm, or abdominal muscles and are the result of depleted salt content due to heavy sweating. First aid includes stopping all activity and moving to a cooler place, drinking clear liquids or a sports beverage to replace lost electrolytes, and avoiding strenuous work after the cramps subside.
- **Heat syncope or fainting/dizziness** may occur after rising suddenly from a sitting or squatting position or from standing for a long period. It is the result of dehydration or lack of acclimatization to hot and humid climate. First aid is similar to that for heat cramps. In both cases, the worker should be monitored for other symptoms that may indicate onset of heat stroke or heat exhaustion.

Community Centers should train their employees to recognize signs of heat related illnesses and basic first aid measures. Although anyone may suffer from some of the symptoms of heat related illness, they are preventable and treatable before a life-threatening condition develops. Train your staff to watch out for the signs and symptoms in your IDD clients and each other and to not be afraid to act.