

How to protect yourself from a Heat Wave
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How bad a heat wave can be in Odisha?

Last year (2012) due to record level of heat wave (47.6 degrees) in Odisha 131 people (officially recorded) died just in two days of June. The Global Warming trend continues to show frequent heat waves in Odisha. Even in western countries unfortunate deaths of this kind may happen. In August 2003 in the hottest summer since 1540, the temperature topped at 40 degrees Centigrade and more than 40,000 people died in France.

In Odisha not many people have air conditioners and those who have may not be lucky to have electricity all the time when needed. The death counts may not be accurate for two reasons. One is that our statistics are not accurate, and secondly the criteria of a heat wave death are complex. Only a qualified doctor can determine the cause and the patient may not have seen a doctor. Last year (2012) two deaths in our home and relative's occurred during hot summer with same symptoms such as rising body temperature and additional unknown causes. Both were in their 80's. The deaths may very well be due to heat wave but no qualified and conclusive causes were given.

Warning signs:

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warning signs of heat stroke vary but may include the following:

- Body temperature goes above 40 degrees Centigrade.
- Appearance of red, hot and dry skin (no sweating).
- Rapid, strong pulse.
- Throbbing headache.
- Dizziness.
- Nausea.
- Confusion.
- Loss of consciousness.

How do you prevent it?

Heat-related deaths and illnesses are preventable. The best way to protect ourselves is to be aware of the signs of stress and apply common sense. Infants, children and people age 65 and over are more prone to heat stress than others. More attention is needed for these groups.

The body normally cools itself by sweating. But under some extreme conditions, sweating just isn't enough. When the humidity is high, for example, sweat will not evaporate as quickly, preventing the body from releasing heat quickly. In such cases, a person's body temperature rises rapidly. Very high body temperatures may damage the brain or other vital organs. People with heart disease, other chronic medical conditions, obesity, fever, dehydration, poor circulation, mental illness, sun burn, some prescription drugs and drinking alcohol elevate the risks.

Some things you can do to relieve heat stress:

- Go to air-conditioned environments, such as shopping malls, public libraries or heat-relief shelters.

- Drink cool, nonalcoholic beverages. Increase fluid intake, regardless of your activity level. Don't wait until you're thirsty.
- Take a cool shower, bath or sponge bath.
- Avoid direct sunlight; wear sunscreen, a hat and sunglasses.
- Wear loose-fitting, lightweight and light-colored clothes.
- If you are older than 65, ask someone to call or check on you twice a day during a heat wave.
- If you know someone in this age group, check on that person at least twice a day.
- Use white top umbrellas to reflect back heat.



White Umbrella to reflect back a part of heat

Please visit www.odishagateway.org to send your comments or ask questions.

References:

Washington Post Lena Sun

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/07/26/AR2010072604727.html?sid=ST2010072605002>