

Heat Illness

What Parents Need to Know

What is heat illness?

Heat illness, the leading cause of preventable death in high school athletics, describes several conditions caused by dehydration and heat exposure, including:

- Heat cramps
- Heat fainting
- Heat exhaustion
- Heat stroke

Heat stroke occurs when internal body temperature reaches 104 degrees F and can be fatal.

Can heat illness be prevented?

Yes. The key to preventing heat illness is acclimating student athletes to activities. The majority of heat-related deaths happen in the first few days of practice—usually the result of doing too much, too fast, too soon. Physical exertion and training activities should begin slowly and continue progressively. When heat or humidity increase beyond acceptable levels, your school may modify practice plans and game times.

What are the warning signs of dehydration?

- Noticeable thirst
- Irritability
- Headache
- Goosebumps
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Muscle cramps
- Chills
- Nausea or vomiting
- Heat sensations in the head or neck
- Decreased performance

What should I do in the event of heat illness?

If your child exhibits any signs of dehydration, call emergency medical personnel and immediately begin cooling your child.

- Get your child to an air-conditioned or shady area and stop all activity.
- Cool your child rapidly with a cold bath or shower; a sponge with cold water; or a cool, wet sheet and then fan him or her vigorously.
- Monitor body temperature until it drops to at least 101 to 102 degrees F.

What can I do before practices and games?

Encourage your child to stay hydrated by providing plenty of water or sports drinks with electrolytes. Hydration is essential to preventing heat illness, and proper hydration starts at home. Do not allow your child to replace water or electrolyte drinks with dehydrating fruit juices, energy drinks, or caffeinated beverages.