Caring for children in very hot weather

The following information is intended to help you to look after babies, children and young people during very hot weather and extreme heat conditions.

'Heat illness' in babies and young children

As a person who cares for children it is vital you are aware of the dangers posed by heat for children in summer. 'Heat illness' is a term for a range of conditions, from sunburn and heat rash, to heat cramps and life- threatening heatstroke. Children are more susceptible than adults to these conditions because their bodies are less able to adjust to changes in temperature. Children have less capacity to perspire, which reduces the body's ability to cool itself.

Hot weather can therefore be a time of high risk for younger children, especially babies. Signs of heat stress in babies and children are:

- looking unwell

- rising body temperature

- fewer wet nappies

- increased thirst (but later, as the baby gets weaker, they may drink less)

- dry mouth and eyes

- headache, muscle cramps

- being sleepy or 'floppy'

- confusion, shortness of breath and vomiting

- coma (not rousing when touched or called).

If you notice the symptoms of heat stress in a child in your care contact your local GP or take the child to hospital. For immediate medical attention, telephone 000.

What you can do

- Avoid travelling with children in hot weather if possible, or do it early in the day. Children can overheat very quickly in cars.

- Never leave children in a parked car (not even for a moment).

- Do your best to keep children inside, particularly during the hottest hours of the days between 11am and 4pm.

- If a child is out in the sun, apply sunscreen (at least SPF 30+), have them wear a hat and suitable lightweight, light coloured, long sleeved, loose fitting clothing to protect the skin.

- Provide small, frequent meals. Try not to use the stove. Plan simple meals that require little or no cooking.

- Choose one room in the house that you can stay in during the hottest part of the day. Close the curtains and use a fan for air circulation. It is much easier to keep one room cool, than to try to cool the whole house. Use a room that doesn't get a lot of sun.

- If you have air conditioning, be sure to use it – if not, use electric fans. (Check that the air conditioner is set to 'cool').

  If you are concerned about the cost of air conditioning there is information about managing energy bills at the following internet sites:
    o Easy energy saving tips
    o Easy ways to save energy fact sheet
    o Energy concessions www.sa.gov.au/topics/water-energy-and-environment/energy-bills/energy-concessions
    o Energy bill concessions

- Visit air conditioned public buildings. You can get a lot of relief from visiting the local shopping centre, library, movie cinema etc.

- Plan to do activities with children in the cool of the evenings.

- Use lukewarm baths or showers, or wet towels to cool children down.

- If you are a carer of a child or young person and the weather is, or will be very hot when a family contact visit is to take place please contact your Department for Child Protection social worker to discuss alternative arrangements.

For further information visit the following internet sites

SA Health
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au
Stay healthy in the heat has useful fact sheets on staying healthy in hot weather including:

- Extreme heat: Guide to coping and staying healthy in the heat

- Pregnancy tips during the heat

- Caring for babies and young children in extreme heat

- Older children and teenagers

Women's and children's health network - Child and youth health
www.cyh.com
Parenting and child health contains excellent information for carers of babies

- Babies in hot weather

State Emergency Service - SES
www.ses.sa.gov.au

- Extreme Heat Plan

- Important heat related advice