Safety Tips During Summer Heat Waves

After a long winter here in Wisconsin, most of us just can’t wait for the warmer weather. But sometimes, that lovely warm weather as summer progresses can turn into dangerously high temperatures and high humidity levels which can cause health problems.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, heat-related deaths and illnesses are preventable, yet more than 600 individuals die from extreme heat annually in the United States.

“Extreme heat is responsible for more weather-related deaths each year than any other weather hazard,” says Bridget Gnadt, Emergency Preparedness Coordinator for Waukesha County Health and Human Services. She recommends having a plan to keep cool before the heat hits. “A proper heat plan should make sure you have access to plenty of drinking water as well as ways to cool your body down (such as a cool bath or shower). It should also include a plan for how to get to air-conditioned places to cool down, if necessary, and who you can call for help.”

The CDC says it is important to stay cool, remain hydrated and keep informed. That includes knowing when hot weather is approaching. Getting too hot can make a person sick; you can become ill from the heat if your body cannot compensate for it and properly cool you off. The main things affecting your body’s ability to cool itself during extremely hot weather are high humidity and personal factors such as age, obesity, fever, dehydration, heart disease and poor circulation.

Older adults have a high risk of health challenges during a heat event because their bodies do not adjust as well as younger individuals to sudden changes in temperature; they oftentimes have chronic medical conditions that change normal body responses to heat; and their prescription medications can affect the body’s ability to control its temperature and sweat.

The CDC offers the following precautions can help to prevent serious illness during a heat event:

• Stay in air-conditioned buildings as often as you can. If your home is not air-conditioned, reduce your risk by going to public facilities that are air conditioned. Gnadt says to call 2-1-1 for locations of cooling of shelters.
• Don’t rely on fans as your main cooling device during an extreme heat event.
• With your doctor’s approval, drink more water than usual and don’t wait until you are thirsty to drink.
• Check on a friend or neighbor and have someone do the same for you.
• Don’t use the stove or oven to cook as it will make you and your home hotter.
• Watch or listen to local newscasts for health and safety updates.

If you have symptoms of heat related illness such as muscle cramps, headaches, nausea, vomiting, confusion or high body temperature, seek medical care immediately.
Operating a non-profit organization like Eras requires a staff of 29, about 1,500 volunteers and the ability to raise enough funding to accommodate a $1.9 million annual budget. Financial support ranges from individual client donations and congregational donations to government funding, local/national grants and corporate partnerships.

Heather stresses that Eras receives strong support from the local community which includes individuals of all ages, families with children, teenage school groups and faith-based groups. “To support the mission of Eras, people are able to give of their time, talent or treasure,” she says. “While corporate and large individual financial donations are examples of giving of treasures, volunteer efforts are great examples of people giving of their time and talent.”

When she’s not working, Heather can be found with her family which includes her husband and two children – a baby and a toddler. And of course, singing and songwriting. “It’s neat to see the path my life took because I took a chance on pursuing my music career,” she says. “I’m grateful for all of the things that bring meaning to my life and am happy to take part in helping others lead meaningful lives as well.”

About ten years ago, Heather Uzowulu was in Nashville working hard to get an aspiring musical career off the ground. A singer and songwriter, Heather knew Nashville was a good place for her to do just that. But while there, Heather did something else. She began volunteering with an organization which schedules people to sing at the bedsides of people in hospitals.

“I found myself singing to hospitalized older adults and those at VA facilities and quickly discovered I really liked being with them,” Heather recalls. “I enjoyed hearing them talk about their lives, listening to their wisdom and learning about their unique experiences.”

About the same time, Heather says she was looking to move back home to the Milwaukee area and was looking for a job in the non-profit arena. “A family friend told me about an opening at Eras and I thought this could be a really meaningful opportunity I could enjoy.”

Fast forward a decade and Heather is now Development Director at Eras and as such her job is multi-faceted: from being involved in the day-to-day operations of the organization, grant writing, and marketing to working on philanthropic partnerships with the community, event planning and special programming.

“My job is different every day,” she says. “It’s a nice, fun and challenging mix of many different things.”

A friendly reminder! Clients are asked to please provide seven days notice prior to requesting a service to ensure we have adequate time to find a volunteer. And, we can also take requests up to two months in advance of a future appointment. If you have any questions, please let us know. Thank You!
Food Resources for Older Adults

High inflation and an end to pandemic related FoodShare emergency benefits will affect thousands of older adults beginning this summer. But local food resources are available to help offset the associated economic challenges.

Discounted food from Hunger Task Force’s Mobile Market, the availability of farmer’s markets vouchers, senior Stockboxes and existing community food pantries are options for older adults facing food insecurity.

“An unwinding is beginning to happen with the pandemic recovery,” says Rick Lewandowski, of Hunger Task Force. “When the Public Health Emergency ends, so will the emergency benefits many families and seniors have been receiving throughout the pandemic.”

Individuals who receive FoodShare benefits must renew their benefit program annually; that requirement was lifted during the pandemic but all FoodShare participants must complete a renewal this year.

Lewandowski says that FoodShare recipients will receive in the mail several letters leading up to their renewal date. For any questions related to renewals, call the Hunger Task Force’s FoodShare offices at (414) 988-6501 or (414) 238-6484.

Senior Stockboxes are available for older adults who are 60 years of age or older and whose monthly income is below $1,473 for a single person and $1,984 for a family of two. This is a monthly box of food available at no cost; contents are intended to be a supplement and not a complete diet. Boxes vary each month but generally includes cheese, canned fruit/vegetables, juice, cereal, milk, peanut butter, canned meat, rice, potatoes, or beans.

To apply for a Stockbox, call the Hunger Task Force at (414) 777-0483 or call IMPACT at 2-1-1.

Stockboxes can be picked up at various locations in Milwaukee County and Waukesha County by the individual or by someone the individual denotes as a proxy. Some individuals can have a stockbox delivered by a pilot Stockbox Doordash delivery service funded by United Way of Greater Milwaukee and Waukesha County. In Milwaukee County, call the Hunger Task Force. Waukesha County residents can call the Waukesha Food Pantry at (262) 522-2378.

If you are a Waukesha County resident and are low on food, call the Food Pantry directly at (262) 542-5300.

Hunger Task Force’s Mobile Market is a grocery store on wheels that travels to various Milwaukee County neighborhoods and communities offering access to fresh and healthy foods.

Along with staples, local grocer Piggly Wiggly stocks the Mobile Market with a healthy selection of fresh fruits, vegetables, milk (dairy and nondairy options), chicken, beef, pork, deli meat, cheese, yogurt and more.

Debit cards, credit cards and Quest EBT/FoodShare are accepted for payment; no cash is onboard or accepted. With help from a federal grant, Hunger Task Force also offers an additional 50% off all purchases, says Lewandowski.

In addition, Hunger Task Force staff are available on the Mobile Market to help eligible people apply for FoodShare during Market operating hours. To learn the Mobile Market’s schedule, visit www.hungertaskforce.org and in the search bar, type in Mobile Market. Or call Hunger Task Force at (414) 777-0483.  

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May was Mental Health Awareness Month and marked a perfect
time to discuss mental health and more specifically, mental
illness. We all have brains, which means we all have mental health;
however, not everyone has a mental health condition or mental
illness. But 1 out of 5 Americans experience a mental illness
sometime in their life which is equal to about 52 million people –
children, teens, adults, and older adults. In fact, 25% of all mental
illness happens after age 25; and older adults are not excluded!

Some people believe that older adults, typically 65 or wiser, will
naturally become depressed and that it is a part of normal aging.
THIS IS NOT TRUE! Older adults can still experience real mental
health issues, but there is help, hope, and treatment! Here are
some signs you or someone you know might be struggling with a
treatable mental health condition: • Changes in mood or energy
level • Changes in eating or sleeping habits • Withdrawing from
the people and activities you enjoy • Feeling unusually confused,
forgetful, angry, upset, worried, scared, or getting lost a lot •
Feeling numb or like nothing matters • Having unexplained aches
and pains • Feeling sad, hopeless, overwhelmed, or crying a lot
• Smoking, drinking, or using drugs more than usual • Anger,
irritability, or aggressiveness • Having thoughts and memories
that you can’t get out of your head • Hearing voices or believing
things that are not true • Thinking about hurting yourself •
Thinking life isn’t worth living.

People experiencing mental illness will often experience these
signs over many days, and more often, these signs can last weeks.
If you or someone you know is experiencing any of these signs,
it is important to first reach out to someone and talk with them.
Talk to your best friend, a helpful neighbor, your grandchild, your
child or more importantly, your doctor. Many people think you
must see a psychiatrist to discuss your mental health concerns
but it’s really quite easy to get the conversation started with
your regular doctor. Please know that you are not alone in your
struggles. The most common form of treatment for mental
health conditions is medication, because it often times works!

NAMI: Milwaukee (414) 344-0447, Waukesha (262) 524-8886
Senior Dining Promotes Good Nutrition and Socialization
By Lorie O’Connor, Nutrition Outreach Coordinator
Milwaukee County Aging and Disabilities Services

DO YOURSELF A FAVOR! Take some time to explore all that Senior dining has to offer. We are celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the national Senior Nutrition Program this year and in May, we celebrated Older Americans month.

Primarily funded by Older Americans Act dollars, senior nutrition programs traditionally serve as gathering places for older adults (60+) to access nutritious meals and other vital services that strengthen social connections and promote health and well-being.

While COVID forced the modification of our services from in-person dining to Curbside Pick-up meals, we are excited to see the return to in-person dining again. Our sites are submitting their re-opening plans and will be transitioning back to in-person dining as soon as they are ready and able. In the meantime, folks may have the opportunity to select the curbside pick-up option from a site that continues to offer that service.

We are committed to continuing these essential services while decreasing barriers to access, addressing gaps in service, identifying underserved populations, and introducing new & innovative solutions that keep us moving forward with satisfied customers.

Good nutrition is important at any age, but it’s especially important as we age. The body’s ability to absorb, produce and utilize certain nutrients is reduced over time and can be impacted by various medications. Furthermore, eating well can be a challenge due to any number of factors—dwindling appetites, chronic diseases, oral health concerns, financial constraints, transportation challenges etc.

The only qualifier for enjoying a meal with Senior Dining is being 60 years or older. There are no residency requirements or income restrictions. While there is no actual charge for the meal, participants are encouraged to contribute whenever they are willing or able. Our goal is simply to bring healthy food options to seniors while creating opportunities to make meaningful social connections and providing access to relevant programs, activities, and resources to support and enrich one’s life.

For specific details on getting started contact the Dining Site of your choice. Or call your Senior Dining Office:
• Milwaukee County Office: (414) 289-6995
• Waukesha County Office: (262) 548-7826

In-Person Meals Available Again at Two Milwaukee County Senior Centers
Kelly Senior Center in Cudahy and Clinton & Bernice Rose Senior Center in Milwaukee have resumed in-person dining for adults 60 or better. Curbside pickup remains at the other three senior centers.

Lunchtime meals are served Monday through Friday and are hot, nutritious, and balanced. Reservations must be made for in-person dining by calling the applicable telephone number below between 9:30-11 am the day prior to dining. Suggested donation is $3 for diners 60 and over and a cost of $8 for their guests under 60.

Curbside pick-up for lunch remains possible at the other three senior centers – orders must be placed at the same time as above by calling the below applicable telephone number; pickup is between 11 am and 12 noon.

Clinton & Bernice Rose Senior Center (in-person dining) - Dining: (414) 263-2255
Kelly Senior Center (in-person dining) - Dining: (414) 483-3532
McGovern Park Senior Center (curbside pickup) - Dining: (414) 527-0990
Washington Park Senior Center (curbside pickup) - Dining: (414) 933-2332
Wilson Park Senior Center (curbside pickup) - Dining: (414) 282-3284
Two Eras Volunteers Honored at Tapestry Event

Eras Senior Network honored two local individuals for making a positive impact in the lives of older adults in the Milwaukee area at the agency’s recent Tapestry Event. Tapestry is Eras’ premiere fundraiser each year and this year’s event attracted 153 individuals in person and another 53 participants of an online auction.

Robert Best received the Edmond J. Vaklyes, Jr. Memorial Award in recognition of those who support seniors, adults with disabilities and their families.

Delorse Harrington received the Board of Directors Award to recognize an individual or organization which has made significant and sustained contributions of time, talent, or treasure to help advance the mission of Eras Senior Network.

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Farmers’ Market Vouchers are available to adults at least 60 years of age and within certain income eligibility limits. Individuals are provided with vouchers which can be used at any participating farmers’ market or roadside stand in Wisconsin between June 1 to October 31.

Vouchers can be used to purchase fresh fruits, vegetables or herbs. No change is given if the amount due is lower than the voucher; if an amount due is greater than a voucher, a person can pay in cash the additional amount.

Milwaukee County vouchers will be available beginning in mid-June by calling the Hunger Task Force office at (414) 777-0483 or visit the website at www.hungertaskforce.com.

Waukesha County vouchers will be distributed beginning June 1. For more information, call the Waukesha County ADRC at (262) 548-7848.

Homebound older adults who are 60 years of age or older and who are unable to physically or mentally prepare their own meals are eligible to receive hot, nutritious lunches Monday through Friday through the Meals on Wheels program.

Meals are delivered to the older adult and the older adult must be home at the time of delivery. Cost is on a donation basis.

For more information or to find out if you are eligible to receive Meals on Wheels lunches, call the Aging and Disability Resource Center in Milwaukee County at (414) 289-6874. In Waukesha County, call the ADRC at (262) 584-7848.