

Week of July 6, 2009



Capitol Report

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[Beating the Heat](#)

As Missourians we have a saying about the unpredictable weather: If you don't like it, wait five minutes and it will change. Now that we are in the middle of summer, two things in Missouri stay fairly constant—heat and humidity. With the heat index reaching near 100 degrees in recent weeks, I thought it would be beneficial to pass along some tips that will help protect you and your family during the hot summer months. And with county fairs in Cass, Johnson, Bates and Vernon counties this week and next, now is an important time to think about ways to stay cool.

July is UV Safety Awareness Month, and Missouri health officials are urging residents to protect their skin and their eyesight from the damaging effects of the sun. We all enjoy being outside on a sunny day, but the sun's ultraviolet light increases the risk of cataracts and leads to approximately 20,000 new cases of skin cancer every year in Missouri. Around 95 percent of skin cancer cases are caused by exposure to ultraviolet light, nearly all of which comes from sunlight, making it very important to regularly apply sunscreen (at least SPF 15, which filters out around 95 percent of UV rays) and wear protective sunglasses.

Sunscreen should be applied at least 20 minutes prior to being exposed to the sun and re-applied every two hours. Also, if possible, avoid the sun between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m., when its rays are most damaging. Even 15 minutes in the sun without protection can harm the skin. Skin turning pink, red or brown is a sign that damage has occurred, increasing the risk for skin cancer in the future. For more information about preventing skin cancer, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at www.cdc.gov/cancer/skin.

To protect your eyes, wear sunglasses that block 100 percent of UV-A and UV-B rays. Exposure to bright sunlight may increase the risk of developing cataracts, age-related

macular degeneration and growths on the eye, including cancer. Information about protecting the eyes from the sun's ultraviolet rays can be found at the American Academy of Ophthalmology's website at www.geteyesmart.org/eyesmart/summer.cfm.

Another source of danger is the heat and humidity of Missouri summers, which can be a threat to small children, the elderly and the chronically ill. However, high temperatures and humidity levels can also take their toll on young, healthy people, health officials warn. Among the 10 Missourians who died last year from heat-related causes, only three were age 65 or older. Surprisingly, seven were 25 to 64 years old, showing that excessive exposure to heat and humidity can affect anyone.

As temperatures and humidity increase, Missourians need to be cautious about heat-related illness. Overall, between 2000 and 2008, 203 Missourians died from heat-related causes. The elderly and chronically ill are often more vulnerable because they perspire less and are more likely to be taking medications that can impair the body's response to heat. Those medications include antihistamines, heart drugs, over-the-counter sleeping pills, antidepressants, antipsychotics, major tranquilizers and some medications for Parkinson's disease. People should check with their doctor or pharmacist to find out if their medications make them more sensitive to heat.

Seniors on fixed incomes may not have air conditioning because they cannot afford the expense of running it. Many senior citizens live alone, so if you have any elderly family members and neighbors, you should try to check on them regularly. You may also call the state's toll-free abuse and neglect hotline at 1-800-392-0210 to report any seniors or people with disabilities suffering from heat and needing assistance.

Children are also sensitive to heat. They need to drink plenty of fluids during hot weather. Infants and young children should never be left unattended in hot environments, especially cars, even if the air conditioner is running. A car's interior only takes a few minutes to reach oven-like temperatures, putting anyone left inside at risk of overheating. For warning signs of heat-related illness and ways to treat the heat, visit www.dhss.mo.gov/Hyperthermia/HeatPrecautions.html.

As always, please feel free to contact me or my staff with any questions or concerns at any time. We look forward to hearing your comments and suggestions and trying to answer any questions you may have. You can reach us by phone at 866-277-0882 (toll-free) or 573-751-2272, or by fax at 573-526-7381.

Senator David Pearce serves Bates, Cass, Johnson and Vernon counties in the 31st State Senate District.

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