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NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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Dept. of Health Reminds People to Take Precautions against Heat-Related Illnesses this Summer

Parents Urged to Never Leave Child Unattended in Vehicles

(Santa Fe) – With the temperatures heating up around the state, the New Mexico Department of Health is reminding residents to take precautions against heat-related illnesses, especially with children and the elderly. The Department of Health is also reminding parents to never leave children unattended in cars because of the potential for heat-related illnesses.

“Never under any circumstances should you leave your child in your car because the inside of the car can reach extreme temperatures quickly that could cause a serious health emergency,” Department of Health Cabinet Secretary, Dr. Catherine Torres said. “If you see a child alone in a car and you cannot find the parents or caregivers, and the doors are locked, call 911 immediately to help get them out. Parents should also teach children not to play in any vehicle. Car keys and remote openers should never be left within reach of children.”

In New Mexico, 12 children died and 28 were hospitalized because of heat-related illnesses between 2005 and 2009. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, an average of 36 children per year dies in an automobile as a result of heat stroke. Especially during the summer, the rapidly rising temperature inside a locked car can be fatal for a small child in just a matter of minutes.

People at greatest risk of heat-related illness include the elderly, the very young, and people with chronic diseases. People in these groups should be monitored to make sure they are not suffering from heat-related illness. Healthy people can also become ill if they participate in strenuous physical activity during hot weather conditions.

The warning signs of heat exhaustion include heavy sweating, paleness, muscle cramps, tiredness, weakness, dizziness, headache, nausea or vomiting and fainting. Dehydration and over exposure to the sun can cause heatstroke, a potentially life-threatening illness that causes the body's normal mechanisms for dealing with heat stress, such as sweating and temperature control, to shut down. The main sign of heatstroke is an elevated body temperature greater than 104 and changes in mental status ranging from personality changes to confusion.

“If you suspect heatstroke in someone, move the person out of the sun and into a shady or air-conditioned space, cool the person by covering him or her with damp sheets or by spraying with



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cool water, direct air onto the person with a fan or newspaper, have the person drink cool water if he or she is able and dial 911 immediately,” Dr. Torres said.

To prevent heat-related illnesses the Department of Health recommends the following:

- Find a cool area in your area or in your home
- Drink plenty of water or other cool beverages; avoid sugary or carbonated drinks and drinks that contain alcohol
- Take a cool shower, bath or sponge bath with cool water
- Wear light, loose fitting clothing such as cotton
- Monitor your physical condition and that of your family for signs or symptoms of heat illness
- If possible, remain indoors during the hottest time of day

More information on heat-related illness can be found on the New Mexico Department of Health website at www.nmhealth.org.

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