

Ontarians encouraged to practise sun safety for rest of summer

The end of summer may be drawing close, but high temperatures are still expected.

Dr. Graham Pollett, Ontario's acting Chief Medical Officer of Health, is encouraging people to protect themselves from overexposure to the sun.

This is to help prevent painful sunburn that can increase the risk of developing skin cancer. Ontarians are also being reminded to take special care to prevent heat-related illness.

“Everyone enjoys a warm, sunny summer day,” he said. “At the same time, it's important to protect yourself from overexposure to the sun and harmful UV rays. It doesn't take much to practise sun safety and still enjoy the great summer weather.”

There are a number of things that people can do to protect themselves and their families from the sun and extreme heat. That includes using sunscreen (SPF 30 or higher) and reapplying at least every two hours or after swimming or sweating a lot. This applies for even cloudy days, since the sun can penetrate light cloud cover.

Pollett encourages helping to protect those most vulnerable to extreme heat and burns, especially infants under one year of age and the elderly.

Limiting sun exposure around mid-day when the sun is at its strongest is also advised, as is wearing wide-brimmed hats and clothing with light fabrics to shade the skin.

If possible, stay in air conditioned rooms, either at home, a friend's place or public places such as malls, libraries and specially designated facilities in the community.

People should also drink lots of cool water, even before they feel thirsty, and exercise in the early morning or late evening, when the sun's rays are less intense.

About 30,000 Ontarians are diagnosed with skin cancer annually, accounting for about one-third of all cancer diagnoses.

The World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer reports that the risk of skin cancer, particularly melanoma, increases by 75 per cent when tanning beds are used prior to the age of 35. To help more young people stay healthy, Ontario recently introduced legislation to ban those under 18 from using tanning beds.

Symptoms of heat stroke include headache, dizziness, fainting, confusion or other altered mental state. Skin may become hot and dry, or there may be sweating due to high body temperature.

Exposure to excessive heat can also cause cramps (usually in the legs or abdomen) and exhaustion that includes heavy sweating, weakness, dizziness, nausea, vomiting and fainting.