
Queensland heat wave puts lives at risk

Doctors are urging Queenslanders to pay special attention to the elderly and the very young as severe heatwave conditions continue this week with predictions of temperatures of up to 40 degrees in some of the parts of the South East.

Australian Medical Association (AMA) Queensland President Dr Dilip Dhupelia said heat waves claimed more than 50 lives a yearⁱ across Australia with the aged and the very young most vulnerable.

“Multiple temperature records were broken in Queensland last week and the forecast is for more severe heat in coming days,” Dr Dhupelia said.

“Conditions were so severe last week that Queensland Ambulance Service experienced unprecedented heat related call outs and Queensland Health activated its State-wide Heatwave Response Plan.

“Heat waves are one of this country’s most deadly natural phenomena and can be extremely dangerous for our elderly, babies, pregnant women, breast-feeding mothers and the sick.”

Dr Dhupelia urged people to make contact with elderly family or neighbours to ensure they were staying cool and keeping hydrated.

“If possible, they should spend a few hours in the middle of the day in air-conditioning or shower, swim or use wet towels to help cool down,” he said. “They also need to drink plenty of fluids to help avoid dehydration.”

The Bureau of Meteorology is warning extreme heatwave conditions would continue in central and northern Queensland over the coming days and temperatures would continue to climb up to 40 degrees in the South East of the state.

Dr Dhupelia warned Queenslanders to be on the lookout for the signs of heat exhaustion.

“Heat exhaustion occurs when excessive sweating reduces blood volume and may cause paleness, an increased heart rate, muscle cramps, nausea, headache, vomiting and dizziness,” he said.

He said the more severe heatstroke occurred when the body’s core temperature rose above 40.5 degreesⁱⁱ and organs started to fail.

Signs of this included delirium, possible seizures and loss of consciousness.

“If you begin to experience the symptoms of heat exhaustion, lie down somewhere cool, drink chilled water and contact a doctor immediately,” Dr Dhupelia said.

AMA Queensland also advises people spending time outdoors should drink plenty of water, try and stay in the shade and wear loose-fitting clothing and a hat.

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ⁱ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1462901114000999>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/heatstroke>