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## Beat the heat

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The hottest months of the year are on the horizon, and health organizations nationwide are urging Soldiers and civilians to start preparing now to prevent heat illnesses.

Each year in the United States, an average of 658 people die as a result of extreme heat, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The CDC recommends everyone take the necessary steps to protect themselves such as staying cool, hydrated and prepared.

The Army is not immune to heat injury, and hundreds of Soldiers suffer from heat illness each year.

“Despite our best efforts, the incidence of heat-related illnesses has remained stable,” said Maj. David DeGroot, Ph.D., U.S. Army Public Health Center (Provisional), Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland. “Over the past five years, more than 200 Soldiers have been hospitalized due to heat stroke each year, and over 1,000 additional Soldiers have been hospitalized for other heat illnesses.”

Fortunately, leaders and Soldiers can take preventive measures to reduce the risk of serious heat illness. DeGroot said leaders should arrange training schedules so the most strenuous activities take place in the early morning rather than during the hottest part of the day.

“Likewise, strenuous activities should not be scheduled back-to-back,” DeGroot said. “There is a cumulative effect of repetitive days of training in warm or hot conditions. Therefore, leaders might also need to modify training based on the prior day’s weather and their Soldiers’ activity level.”

Soldiers can help reduce their risk by taking care of their bodies. DeGroot said an out-of-shape male Soldier is at three times the risk of suffering an exertional heat injury, while a Soldier who is both out of shape and overweight is at eight times the risk.

“Preparing for the heat starts with a year-round approach to maintaining physical fitness and a healthy body weight,” DeGroot said.

Soldiers and leaders must also remember proper hydration can help prevent heat illness. While there is no consensus for the best method of determining hydration status in the field, DeGroot said the combination of first morning urine color assessment, body weight changes and thirst sensation can be helpful indicators. The presence of two of those three markers indicates dehydration is likely, while three out of three indicates dehydration is very likely.

“Serious heat illnesses are preventable, but doing so requires a two-pronged approach between leaders and Soldiers,” DeGroot said. “When we take the time to prepare, there’s no reason we can’t beat the heat.”

For more information on heat injury prevention, visit <https://safety.army.mil>.