

SUMMER HEAT & THE HOMELESS

With each passing day the temperatures are growing more dangerous for the homeless community in Nashville. Any Tennessee resident can tell you the weather here is incredibly unpredictable, but in the summertime one thing is for certain—humidity takes over.

As these hot summer days grow humid, muggy, and uncomfortable, it's natural to wonder how anyone could tolerate spending extensive time outdoors. For many in the homeless community in Nashville, they don't have a choice. When temperatures rise, it can be difficult for them to find cool shelter or shade—much less water.

The Importance of Hydrating the Homeless

Water is vital to life, and yet so many people lack access to this resource. In a city like Nashville, where heat is on the rise and many of the homeless stand in the face of the blistering sun, it makes you wonder why there isn't a water fountain on every block. Without water, there is a serious and life-threatening risk of untreated dehydration.

As scary as that sounds, what is even scarier is that 75 percent of Americans (homeless or otherwise) are chronically dehydrated! Why? Because alcohol and caffeine intake paired with a high sodium diet offsets the intake of otherwise hydrating fluids.

The Pain and Risk of Dehydration

According to the National Health Care for the Homeless Council, "Persons who live on the streets or in shelters are at increased risk for dehydration in warmer climates, particularly during summer months." Many homeless people do not have access to the appropriate amount of clean water, if any at all. Without fluids, you become dehydrated and your body can suffer from thirst pains, fatigue, irritability, poor immunity, dry mouth, and more. When dehydration is left untreated, the effects become severe and can lead to sunken eyes, lack of urination, seizures, brain damage, and even death.

Heat Exhaustion and Heat Stroke

Without relief from the heat, many members of the homeless community may suffer from heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke. Sadly, death as a result of these symptoms is not uncommon. On days when the temperature rises above 92 degrees (by noon), Nashville Rescue Mission patrols the streets of Nashville giving water to the homeless and offers them a loving invitation to come back to the Mission where there is air conditioning, food, and shelter. If you want to help the homeless in Nashville survive the heat this summer and stay hydrated year-round, consider donating water bottles and funds to the Mission. Together, we can prevent a life from being lost to extreme heat.

KEYS TO SURVIVAL:

Stay Cool

Keep your body temperature cool to avoid heat-related illness.

- Stay in air-conditioned buildings as much as possible.
- Find an air-conditioned shelter.
- Do not rely on a fan as your primary cooling device.
- Avoid direct sunlight.
- Wear lightweight, light-colored clothing.
- Take cool showers or baths.
- Check on those most at-risk twice a day.

Stay Hydrated

Because your body loses fluids through sweat, you can become dehydrated during times of extreme heat.

- Drink more water than usual.
- **Don't wait** until you're thirsty to drink more fluids.
- Drink from two to four cups of water every hour while working or exercising outside.
- Avoid alcohol or liquids containing high amounts of sugar.
- Remind others to drink enough water.

Stay Informed

Stay updated on local weather forecasts so you can plan activities safely when it's hot outside.

- Check local news for extreme heat alerts and safety tips.
- Learn the symptoms of heat illness.

<https://www.cdc.gov/extremeheat/warning.html>

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF HEAT ILLNESS

Signs of Heat Exhaustion

- Heavy sweating
- Weakness
- Cold, pale, and clammy skin
- Fast, weak pulse
- Nausea or vomiting
- Fainting

What you should do:

- Move to a cooler location
- Lie down and loosen your clothing
- Apply cool, wet cloths to as much of your body as possible
- Sip water
- If you have vomited and it continues, seek medical attention immediately

Signs of Heat Stroke:

- High body temperature (above 103°F)
- Hot, red, dry, or moist skin
- Rapid and strong pulse
- Possible unconsciousness

What should you do:

- Call 911 immediately, this is a medical emergency
- Move the person to a cooler environment
- Reduce the person's body temperature with cool cloths or even a bath
- Do NOT give fluids

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HOW WATER CAN HELP

- Water covers over 70% of the Earth's surface, and is vital for all known forms of life.
- Clean drinking water is essential to humans.
- The human body contains anywhere from 55% to 78% water depending on body size.
- Blood is 80% water and muscles are 70% water.
- The waterway flows through your body, delivers nutrients to cells, and carries away waste.
- Water acts as your body's cooling system, moving heat to the skin surface where it evaporates away in sweat and breath.
- Water lubricates joints, softens skin, and makes muscles work more smoothly.
- If your body is temporarily short of water you will develop a condition called “dehydration” that affects every organ in your body.
- It is not clear how much water intake healthy people need, though most advocates agree 6–7 glasses of water (approximately 2 liters) daily is the minimum to maintain proper hydration. The precise amount depends on the level of activity, temperature, humidity, and other factors.

HOW YOU CAN HELP: DONATE WATER

It is absolutely imperative that those with access to clean drinking water take advantage of it—not only by opting to drink water instead of soda or alcohol, but by donating it.

Every life matters, both inside and outside of our community, and you can help save those lives by donating water. Nashville Rescue Mission’s Hot Patrol is a great resource that works to provide those on the streets with bottled water and other resources during extremely hot days. However, there is a greater need.

Water intake isn’t only essential on the hottest days of the year—people need fluids to survive day in and day out regardless of the weather. You can help keep the homeless community in Nashville hydrated, healthy, and safe by donating water bottles to Nashville Rescue Mission today. You can also [donate online now](#) to contribute funds to support our efforts or check out our [donations wish list](#).