Public Health Issues Related to Summertime Blackouts

Personal preparation for blackouts is similar to preparation for natural disasters. We recommend that people develop an emergency plan that includes a disaster supply kit. This kit should include enough water, food, and emergency supplies for at least 3 days. Details on emergency plans and supply kits can be found at [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov).

Heat is the major public health problem related to blackouts for two reasons:
- Extreme heat causes most summertime blackouts
- In a blackout, the main public health intervention for heat-related illness (air conditioning) is unavailable – this represents “a disaster within a disaster”

Heat Facts
- Heat causes about 400 deaths per year in the U.S. – more than all other natural disasters combined
- During the Chicago heat wave of 1995, over 650 people died in under 2 weeks
- ALL HEAT-RELATED DEATHS ARE PREVENTABLE
- The people most at-risk from heat include:
  - The elderly
  - The poor
  - People in inner cities
  - People with chronic illness
  - Homebound people
  - Children under the age of 5 years

CDC RECOMMENDATIONS (in the absence of air conditioning):
- CHECK FREQUENTLY ON THOSE AT HIGH RISK
- Drink plenty of non-alcoholic, non-caffeine liquids
- Reduce strenuous activities
- Take cool showers/baths frequently
- Wear lightweight, light-colored clothing
- Most importantly, cities should have in place a comprehensive Heat Emergency Response Plan

HEAT EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN
- SHOULD BE IN PLACE FOR ALL AT-RISK CITIES
- Must have certain critical elements:
  - Close coordination with National Weather Service
  - Effective early warning
  - Consistent, understandable messages directed towards high-risk groups
  - Regular personal contact with at-risk individuals
  - Availability of, and transportation to, emergency shelters
  - Collaboration among municipal agencies, hospitals, industry, NGO’s, and others
- CDC is available to work with cities in the development of these plans
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For more information, visit www.bt.cdc.gov or call the CDC public response hotline at (888) 246-2675 (English), (888) 246-2857 (Español), or (866) 874-2646 (TTY)