

Safety Tip of the Month – August 2006
VSI Safety Committee

“Keep Your Cool”

So, you are at a swim meet, and it is more than 95 degrees in the shade. There is not a cloud to be seen in the deep blue sky and the sun strikes like an oven over the entire 50 meter pool and deck. You forgot your straw hat, and you later realize that your suntan lotion has already leaked out into your swim bag. So, how can you survive the next 8 hours at this swim meet?

Here are a few easy guidelines that may prevent heat exhaustion and dehydration:

1. Drink lots of water the evening before and the morning of the meet. (It is better to be running back and forth to the bathroom a bit more, than fainting on the pool deck from dehydration!). Try to drink at least one pint of water (500 ml) every 2 hours during the meet. If it is extremely hot or you are exerting yourself continuously, you will need even more.
2. After every third glass of water, drink a glass of electrolyte solution (Gatorade, Pedialyte, other Sports Drinks will work). This helps replace electrolytes such as sodium and chloride that are lost during the sweating process.
3. Try to limit your caffeine intake. Caffeine will decrease your cooling ability, due to vasoconstriction of your superficial blood vessels. Furthermore, caffeine will cause you to urinate more frequently and in greater amounts, thus predisposing you to greater water loss.
4. Remember to EAT! Hot weather blunts the appetite, however your body still needs energy sources, and you will likely feel even weaker and have trouble concentrating if you decline food after several hours. Try frozen grapes, chilled melon balls, very cold crackers with cheese spread, or chilled chocolate squares.
5. Bring a small fan (and extension cord) with you, if you are working at the administrative table, concession stand, or the awards table. Air circulation helps dissipate the heat on your skin and enhances the cooling process.
6. Sit down whenever you can, to conserve your energy and minimize heat buildup.
7. Invest in a cheap wide brim hat. This provides more sun protection than a cap.
8. Wear cool clothing. Remember that white clothing reflects light, whereas dark clothing absorbs light and retains more heat.
9. If you are next to the pool and are permitted to dip your hand in the water (in between races or during warm-ups), splash water on your legs and your entire

arm... let it drip off and air dry. The evaporative process will help you lose heat quicker.

10. If at any time you begin to feel lightheaded or note that you are having trouble concentrating, sit down and put your head between your legs, OR lie down if there is a place to do so. Ask a friend to bring you a cold wet towel and place it over your entire face and neck. Ask the lifeguards to obtain three small plastic bags of ice...wrap two in a towel and place in each armpit, and with the third: Take a few ice chips and suck on them. Do NOT drink any fluids at this time, since you may become nauseated and could vomit.

These collective actions usually turn things around, BUT if you still feel very weak and lightheaded, you should have a friend call 911 and be evaluated at the nearest medical facility.

By taking proactive steps, you can STAY AHEAD of the heat at aquatic events. Remember, STAY COOL AT THE POOL!