**Parents’ and Coaches’ Guide to Dehydration and Other Heat Illnesses in Children**

These guidelines were developed to help parents and coaches increase the safety and performance of children who play sports inhot weather. Children who play sports or are physically active in hot weather can be at risk for heat illnesses.

The good news is heat illnesses can be prevented and successfully treated. Children sweat less than adults. This makes it harder for children to cool off. Parents and coaches must make sure that children take it slow to be sure they can get used to the heat and humidity gradually.

There are other reasons why a child may become ill from a heat illness. Those who have a low level of fitness, who are sick, or who have suffered from dehydration or heat illness in the past should be closely watched. A medical professional such as a certified athletic trainer (ATC) should be on site to monitor the health and safety of all participants during games and practice, especially when it is very hot and humid.

**Dehydration**

Children get dehydrated if they do not replace body fluids lost by sweating. Being even a little dehydrated can make a child feel bad and play less effectively. Dehydration also puts children at risk for more dangerous heat illnesses.

**Signs and Symptoms**

\_ Dry mouth

\_ Thirst

\_ Being irritable or cranky

\_ Headache

\_ Seeming bored or disinterested

\_ Dizziness

\_ Cramps

\_ Excessive fatigue

\_ Child not able to run as fast or play as well as usual

**Treatment**

\_ Move child to a shaded or air-conditioned area.

\_ Give him or her fluids to drink.

**"When can I play again?"**

A child may be active again as soon as he or she is symptom-free. However, it’s important to continue to watch the child.

**Heat Cramps**

Heat cramps are a mild heat illness that can be easily treated. These intense muscle spasms usually develop after a child has been exercising for a while and has lost large amounts of fluid and salt from sweating. While heat cramps are more common in children who perform in the heat, they can also occur when it’s not hot (for example, during ice hockey or swimming). Children who sweat a lot or have a high concentration of salt in their sweat may be more likely to get heat cramps. Heat cramps can largely be avoided by being adequately conditioned, getting used to the heat and humidity slowly, and being sure a child eats and drinks properly.

**Signs and Symptoms**

\_ Intense pain (not associated with pulling or straining a muscle)

\_ Persistent muscle contractions that continue during and after exercise

**Treatment**

\_ The child should be given a sports drink to help replace fluid and sodium losses.

\_ Light stretching, relaxation and massage of the cramped muscles may help.

**"When can I play again?"**

A child may be active again when the cramp has gone away and he or she feels and acts ready to

participate. You can help decrease the risk of recurring heat cramps by checking whether the child

needs to change eating and drinking habits, become more fit, or get better adjusted to the heat.

**Heat Exhaustion**

Heat exhaustion is a moderate heat illness that occurs when a child continues to be physically active even after he or she starts suffering from ill effects of the heat, like dehydration. The child’s bodystruggles to keep up with the demands, leading to heat exhaustion.

**Signs and Symptoms**

\_ Child finds it hard or impossible to keep playing

\_ Loss of coordination, dizziness or fainting

\_ Dehydration

\_ Profuse sweating or pale skin

\_ Headache, nausea, vomiting or diarrhea

\_ Stomach/intestinal cramps or persistent muscle cramps

**Treatment**

\_ Move child to a shaded or air-conditioned area.

\_ Remove any extra clothing and equipment.

\_ Cool the child with cold water, fans or cold towels (replace towels frequently).

\_ Have child lie comfortably with legs raised above heart level.

\_ If the child is not nauseated or vomiting, have him or her drink chilled water or sports drink.

\_ The child’s condition should improve rapidly, but if there is little or no improvement, take the

child for emergency medical treatment.

**"When can I play again?"**

A child should not be allowed to return to play until all symptoms of heat exhaustion and dehydration are gone. Avoid intense practice in heat until at least the next day, and if heat exhaustion was severe, wait longer. If the child received emergency medical treatment, he or she should not be allowed to return until his or her doctor approves and gives specific return-to-play

instructions.

Parents and coaches should rule out any other conditions or illnesses that may predispose the child for continued problems with heat exhaustion. Correct these problems before the child returns to full participation in the heat, especially for sports with equipment.