

Be on alert for heat stroke

Ann McGlynn | The Quad-City Times | Posted: Saturday, July 28, 2007 | 12:00 am

Dr. Jessica Ellis will never forget the excellent runner who came to the Quad-City Times Bix 7 medical tent with a 108-degree core body temperature.

The athlete was beginning to have chest pains. They packed her in cold blankets and got her to the hospital as fast as possible.

Fast. That is the key in battling heat stroke.

Get victims immersed in cold, preferably ice, water. But it can be iced-down blankets, too, Ellis told about 200 physicians, nurses and other health-care professionals gathered Friday for the 17th annual Cardiology at the Bix conference.

“The best way is the fastest way” to cool people down, she said, saying that there is a “golden hour” when dealing with heat stroke. As more time goes by, more cells are “cooked” and more toxins are released into the system that can cause organs to shut down, especially the kidneys.

Early signs of heat problems are confusion, irritability and poor running posture, said Ellis, a five-year veteran of the medical tent and the new primary-care sports medicine specialist at Orthopaedic and Rheumatology Associates in Davenport.

Later signs include chills and hyperventilation, she said.

One of the most common myths, she added, is that people with heat stroke stop sweating. That is not necessarily the case, she said.

The only way to truly determine whether a person is experiencing heat stroke, she said, is to take a rectal temperature. Patients sometimes appear to be lucid before entering the more serious stages of heat stroke.

Generally speaking, the more fit an athlete is, the less chance of heat stroke. People younger than 14 years and more than 40 years old have a greater chance of experiencing heat-related problems, she said.

Although the heat danger cannot be discounted, today’s Bix 7 should benefit from race-time temperatures near 70 degrees as opposed to the near-record 79 degrees and 85 percent humidity in which it was held last year.

While hydration is important, well-hydrated athletes still can suffer from heat-related problems, Ellis said.

And what about that beer tent at the end of the race?

“That’s not the way to rehydrate, folks,” she said. “We encourage runners to take a few sports drinks, then they can partake.”

Heat Q&A

Q: What is heat exhaustion?

A: When a person's core body temperature — taken rectally — is between 100.4 degrees and 104 degrees

Q: What is heat stroke?

A: When the core body temperature is 104 degrees or above.