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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 22, 2011

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HEALTH DEPARTMENT CAUTIONS ABOUT DEHYDRATION AND HEAT EXHAUSTION

ST. AUGUSTINE, FL – With summer officially upon us, and as temperatures soar into the triple digits, Dawn Allicock, M.D., M.P.H., Director of the St. Johns County Health Department, reminds everyone take precautions against dehydration and heat exhaustion.

Signs of dehydration include thirst, weakness, nausea, muscle cramps, feeling dizzy and light headed, decreased urine levels and/or urine that has a strong odor or is darker than normal, tiredness, sluggishness, irritability and headaches. All, some, or none of these signs may be present, so the best way to avoid dehydration is to monitor water or fluid intake, and modify activity or reduce the length of activity according to weather conditions.

“Don't wait for the dry mouth, flushed skin, headaches, lightheadedness or fatigue. You can prevent dehydration by drinking fluids throughout the day,” said Dawn Allicock, M.D., M.P.H., Director of the St. Johns County Health Department. “Avoid becoming dehydrated by staying out of the direct sun, wearing light colored loose fitting clothing, limiting physical activity, and using fans when available.”

If you suspect you are becoming dehydrated, get to a cool or shady area and sip cool water or fluids. If your condition does not improve, seek medical attention immediately.

To avoid becoming dehydrated, it is important to drink plenty of fluids, especially water, even if you don't feel thirsty. This is particularly true on days when temperatures reach 90°F and higher. Depending upon your physical activity and heat exposure during hot weather, it's a good idea to drink more water. Persons who have medical conditions such as kidney and heart disease, who require a fluid restricted diet, or who have problems with fluid retention should consult a physician before increasing their consumption of fluids.

Babies from birth to 6 months: Healthy infants normally do not need extra water. On a hot day, a small amount of water may be needed, but check with your physician on how much to give.

Babies from 6 - 12 months: Breast or formula-fed babies that are receiving solid foods should also be receiving water.

Children 12 months and older: Should be reminded to drink fluids, preferably water throughout the day. They should be encouraged to drink more on hot days.

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Adults: Should drink fluids, preferably water, throughout the day. When exposed to temperatures reaching 90°F and higher, depending on physical activity level and heat exposure, adults should drink even more water.

Heat exhaustion is a form of heat-related illness that can develop after exposure to high temperatures and inadequate or unbalanced replacement of fluids. Those most prone to heat exhaustion are elderly people, people with high blood pressure and people working or exercising in a hot environment. Warning signs of heat exhaustion vary, but may include the following:

- Heavy sweating
- Paleness
- Muscle cramps
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Nausea or vomiting
- Fainting
- Skin - May be cool and moist
- Pulse rate - Fast and weak
- Breathing - Fast and shallow

If heat exhaustion is untreated, it may progress to heat stroke. Seek medical attention immediately if symptoms are severe, or the victim has heart problems or high blood pressure. Otherwise, help the victim to cool off and seek medical attention if symptoms worsen or last longer than one hour. If heat exhaustion is suspected, cooling measures that may be effective include the following:

- Drink cool, nonalcoholic beverages, as directed by your physician
- Rest in an air-conditioned environment
- Take a cool shower, bath or sponge bath
- Wear lightweight clothing
- Prevent sun burn (which damages the skin's ability to dissipate heat) by wearing sunscreen of 30 SPF.

For further information, please contact the St. Johns County Health Department at (904) 825-5055, or visit www.stjohnschd.org.

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