

Preventing Heat Illness in Youth Players

During prolonged soccer events in the heat, the body responds to increases in temperature through perspiration. As a result, the body loses large amounts of water and essential electrolytes (sodium and potassium) needed for the body to function properly. In order for players to recover effectively and remain in good health, those fluids must be replaced immediately. If not, youth players become increasingly at risk for heat illness—a very avoidable problem.

Youth players struggling with heat illness may become irritable; they may become suddenly fatigued; they may complain of a headache or lightheadedness; or they may become nauseated and vomit. Players who have been recently ill, especially with fever, vomiting, or diarrhea are much more prone to heat illness episodes. Regardless of which symptoms are present, players need to be removed from the game immediately, and every effort should be made to reduce their body temperature and rehydrate them then and there. Players exhibiting severe problems should be referred to the hospital for emergency care.

In terms of (re)hydrating youth players, it is no secret that I am a big fan of **Gatorade**. And because “inquiring minds want to know,” here’s why: Over the years, research has shown consistently that **Gatorade** contains the right amount of essential electrolytes needed for athletes to recover effectively from exercise events. Aside from that, **Gatorade** 1) is absorbed more rapidly than water alone; 2) contains the right amount of carbohydrates needed for energy production; 3) does not cause the “full” or “bloated” feeling that water does; and 4) promotes recovery from exercise events faster than water alone.

Inasmuch as heat illness is much more likely to occur during tournament events than single game events, youth players can **PREVENT** serious problems by following the recommendations below:

1. Beginning one week prior to the tournament event and continuing through its completion, players should **AVOID** the intake of any caffeinated drinks (cola drinks, tea, coffee, etc). Fluid intake should be limited to water-based drinks such as water, lemonade, fruit juices, and others;
2. Every player should have an “igloo” filled with cold water or **Gatorade** for every game;
3. Every team should have on their sidelines, a 10-gallon “igloo” filled with cold water to be used during every game. Do not rely on tournament officials to be the sole provider of cold water;
4. Every team should have ice towels available on their sidelines for every game, and they should be used at every opportunity to lower players’ body temperature;
5. As soon as possible after every game, players should consume at least 20 ounces, and preferably 32 ounces of cold **Gatorade**—the sooner the better!!; and
6. Players should be encouraged to check their urine output and color within one hour after every game. Light colored urine of normal or above-normal amount is indicative of proper fluid intake; urine dark in color, of small amount, and with a strong odor indicates that fluid intake should continue.

In summary, as long as heat and humidity dictate, it is important that youth players

- a) have **unlimited** access to cold water or **Gatorade** during every game;
- b) have **unlimited** access to ice towels to help maintain normal body temperature during every game; and
- c) be encouraged to check urine output and color after every game.