

Keyword: global-warming

Headline: Protecting ourselves against excessive heat

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Published Date: 05:03 AM March 31, 2023

Section: opinion

Word Count: 615

Content:

Global warming is real. And the sooner we learn to adjust and adapt to it, while trying to mitigate it, the better. One such adjustment our schools need to make, in response to this reality, is adjusting schedules of outdoor games.

Now that the heat is oppressive and expected to get worse as the summer months progress, it would be prudent to avoid being under the sun from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. if we can help it, especially if this sun exposure involves excessive physical activity like sports.

The hours between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. are the times of day where temperatures are at their highest. One has only to look at the weather charts of the past, the present, and the predictions of future days to observe this. And even worse than the temperature alone is the combination of high temperature plus high humidity. Why? Because the high humidity prevents perspiration from leaving our skin, thus making it less efficient in cooling our bodies. So for example, even if the maximum temperature is supposed to be 35 degrees Celsius, the heat index, as a result of the combination of heat and humidity, can feel like 39 degrees. This is due to the very high humidity. This combination of heat and high humidity can cause more health problems than dry heat.

Health risks from combination of high temperature and high humidity as we have in the Philippines nowadays are:

Dehydration

Fatigue

Muscle cramps because of electrolyte loss

Heat Exhaustion

Loss of consciousness

Heat stroke

Heat stroke can be fatal. Among the signs and symptoms of a possible impending heat stroke are headaches, confusion, vomiting.

Don't wait for the signs and symptoms from too much heat exposure to come. Avoid them.

If possible, avoid being under the sun from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Aside from the very high heat index, the strong sun is bad for the skin and the eyes. If one cannot avoid being under the sun because of work, then use a hat, UV-coated eyeglasses, sun block, or a combination of all. Try not to play under the sun during this time. Wait until after 4 p.m.

Hydrate, hydrate, hydrate. Drink plenty of water or, better yet, sports drinks with electrolytes.

At the earliest signs or symptoms of dehydration or fatigue or electrolyte imbalance as stated above; stop playing, stop working. Rest. Go to a shaded area or, if possible, go to an air-conditioned area. Hydrate. And seek medical attention asap if you experience vomiting, confusion, headache.

All outdoor sports activities should have a medical professional on hand, especially if the elderly and very young are in attendance.

In view of all of the above and the fact that our summer heat is expected to get worse up to May, I hope our Department of Education and Department of Health can come with specific guidelines on outdoor sports activities during the summer months. Perhaps they should be moved to later in the afternoon if they cannot be held in cool indoor venues? Global warming has made summers more harsh. And we cannot take the combination of scorching heat and humidity for granted. Let's protect our students, let's protect each other.

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Dr. Minguita Padilla is a co-convenor of Doctors for Truth and Public Welfare. She is the founder of the Eye Bank Foundation and served as head executive staff of the Philippine Health Insurance Corp. She has received multiple awards for her work on the prevention of blindness, community service, and curbing insurance fraud.