



## Keeping cool is imperative for seniors

By **SCOTT NILES** Courier staff writer

— OTTUMWA — This week's high temperatures and humidity can be difficult on most anyone, but it's especially troubling for senior citizens.

"Senior citizens and the very young are the most prone to heat stroke and sun-related illnesses," said River Hills Community Health Center Nurse Practitioner Kerri Rupe.

Ottumwa resident Betty Ware knows full well.

"When I was younger, I used to work in the fields with my father and one time I was out there I had a sun stroke," she said. "I was sicker than a dog for several weeks."

"Heat stroke can be detrimental to older individuals, especially if they have a prior history of sun-related illness and if they take a lot of [medicines]," said Rupe.

Heat stroke is the result of being out in extremely hot weather for long periods of time — the heat causes the part of the brain to shut down that controls temperature, therefore the body no longer cools and will overheat. Ware experienced firsthand what the sun can do and said she is getting too old to stay out in the heat for long periods of time.

"I can't take the heat like I used to," she said.

Karen Kaiser, director of nursing at Ottumwa Good Samaritan Center, said she makes sure that her residents do not experience any negative effects of the sun either.

"We keep an eye on them and make sure they are not outside too long," she said. "If we have to, we go get them and bring them back inside."

Kaiser said some older individuals may not realize that they have been outside too long.

"A lot of seniors have poor circulation, so to them the sun feels really good," she said. "A lot of times they want to be outside and we have to tell them they need to come in."

Staying inside with air conditioning is the best way for people to stay cool.

"I think a lot more families are making sure that their parents or grandparents have air conditioning," said Beverly Nicholson, manager of the Ottumwa Senior Center.

Two years ago, she said, officials at the senior center tried leaving the facility open longer to see if there were any elderly residents who wanted to take advantage of the cool air inside; turns out there were not that many.

"We had less than a handful turn out and most of them were just playing cards," she said. "I think mostly everyone has air conditioning today."

Air conditioning is just one way to keep cool.

Other tips include drinking plenty of liquids (excluding caffeine products and alcohol, because they dehydrate the body even more).

And if air conditioning is not available, having some type of circulating device like a fan and/or using a wet cloth is a good idea.

"No one should be out in that kind of heat for a long period, especially the elderly," Rupe said.

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