

Controlling energy usage during summer heat

By TOM LATEK
KENTUCKY TODAY

The first week of July is bringing a heat wave that has air conditioning units humming and fans turning as electric utility customers in Kentucky try to beat the heat. “As temperatures climb, air conditioners have to work harder and use more energy to keep homes cool,” said Ryan Lake, external affairs manager for Ashland-

based Kentucky Power. “Extreme weather like this heat wave can cause customer bills to spike. However, there are many ways customers can control their energy usage, which can help manage high bills, even in extreme heat.”

There are many low- and no-cost energy efficiency measures customers can put into place to save money without jeopardizing

comfort, including:

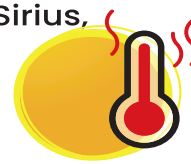
- Repair air leaks in the home; up to 25 percent of energy used to cool homes escapes via leaks.
- Maintain consistent temperatures and monitor your thermostat settings. The U.S. Department of Energy recommends a summer thermostat setting of 75-78 degrees.
- Use ceiling fans to circulate cool air throughout the house

and to help cool people directly. This allows for a higher thermostat setting.

- Close drapes and shades on south-facing windows to block sun and heat during the day.
- Move furnishings away from floor or return air vents for more efficient HVAC operation.
- Avoid using heat-producing appliances such as ovens or dryers during the hottest parts of the day.



The hottest time of the year in the Northern Hemisphere occurs between July 3 and August 11. This period aligns with the rising of Sirius, the “Dog Star.”



Summer health column: Tips to avoid swimmer’s ear

By KENNETH C. IVERSON
UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

Summer brings plenty of opportunities for kids to swim and play outside, but all that time in the water can also raise the risk of swimmer’s ear. Don’t let it interrupt your child’s fun.

What is swimmer’s ear?

Otitis externa, also known as swimmer’s ear, is an infection affecting the outer ear canal. The infection often develops after swimming or other activities that let water into the ears. Trapped moisture in the ear creates an environment where bacteria can grow. At the same time, the skin lining the outer ear canal can soften, making it easier for bacteria to enter

and cause infection.

Some children are more susceptible to swimmer’s ear for reasons that are not always clear. Damage to the outer ear canal — sometimes caused by the misuse of cotton swabs — as well as conditions like eczema and seborrheic dermatitis can increase a child’s risk of developing swimmer’s ear.

What are the symptoms?

Mild cases of swimmer’s ear leave children with itching, slight redness inside the ear and fluid drainage. Children may also feel discomfort that worsens when the ear is touched or pulled, which is distinct from ear pain caused by a typical middle ear infection.

More severe cases

may include severe pain and itchiness, a sensation of fullness inside the ear, partial or complete blocking of the outer ear canal, redness or swelling of the outer ear, drainage of thick and cloudy fluid, decreased hearing, swelling of the lymph nodes or fever.

How is swimmer’s ear treated?

Cases of swimmer’s ear are typically mild and respond well to treatment but should be examined and treated by a doctor. Before seeing a pediatrician, you can help manage your child’s pain at home with acetaminophen or ibuprofen. A doctor can remove infected fluid or debris from the ear canal and may prescribe ear drops to treat the infection and reduce swelling

and pain. Severe cases may require frequent suctioning of debris.

Other treatment options include oral antibiotics and placement of a wick into the ear canal to help drops reach deeper into a blocked canal.

Avoid getting water in the ear during the treatment process and dry the ears and reapply drops after bathing.

Preventing swimmer’s ear

Most children do not need to take special precautions unless they have recurrent infections or a recent infection. If so, limit time in the water to less than an hour and dry excess water

from the outer portion of the ears with a clean towel or a hair dryer on a cool setting.

Sometimes, certain topical drops can be used after water exposure, but consult your doctor to determine which would be appropriate for your child — especially if your child has ear tubes or a hole in the eardrum. Over-the-counter or custom-made earplugs can be used as well to prevent prolonged water exposure to the ear canal for susceptible children.

Avoid using cotton swabs or other devices that can remove too much ear wax or cause small injuries in the ear canal, cre-

ating an opening for bacteria to enter the skin. Ear wax is a natural measure of protection against swimmer’s ear as its oily properties help repel water and have characteristics that naturally resist microbes.

Although a case of swimmer’s ear may be unavoidable for some children, recognizing the signs early and seeking proper treatment can help keep a minor infection from disrupting summertime activities.

This column is by Kenneth C. Iverson, chief of pediatric otolaryngology for Golisano Children’s at UK.

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