

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 1, 2026

Media Contact: Erin Perkins, erin.perkins@vdh.virginia.gov

Rappahannock Area Health District Urges Fourth of July Safety as Heat Wave Approaches

FREDERICKSBURG, Va. – A dangerous heat wave is expected through the Fourth of July weekend, and the Rappahannock Area Health District is reminding everyone to take extra care while celebrating. High temperatures, holiday cookouts, and water activities can increase the risk of heat illness, foodborne illness, and injuries. Simple steps such as staying cool, handling food safely, watching children closely at the pool, and grilling with caution can help keep families safe during the holiday.

“As temperatures rise, protecting your health is extremely important,” says Rachel Stradling, Health Director for the Rappahannock Area Health District. “Stay hydrated, practice food safety, and take breaks in the shade or air-conditioning. Never leave children or pets in parked vehicles and check on neighbors who may need support. Small steps save lives in extreme heat.”

Heat Safety

Extreme heat can be deadly. High temperatures and humidity can put you at risk of [heat-related illness](#). Prolonged exposure to heat can cause cramping, heat exhaustion, heat stroke and even death. Be aware of the signs of [heat stroke](#) and [heat exhaustion](#).

When you are spending time outdoors in the heat, it is important to remember these tips:

- Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water throughout the day, not just when you are thirsty. Avoid sugary, caffeinated and alcoholic drinks.
- Slow down and limit outdoor activities between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m., the hottest time of day. Take breaks in the shade. Check that animals also have access to fresh water and shade.
- Spend time indoors with air conditioning and fans. If you don’t have air conditioning, visit a [cooling center](#). Check on loved ones and neighbors who may be at risk and don’t have air conditioning.

Food Safety

During the summer months, [food poisoning](#) is another concern due to warmer temperatures. Each year, 1 in 6 Americans get sick from eating contaminated food. [Food poisoning symptoms](#) include diarrhea, stomach pain or cramps, nausea, vomiting, and fever. Keep yourself, guests and food safe by following these [safety tips](#):

- Thaw and marinate food in the refrigerator. Cook food to a safe internal temperature. Store cooked food in a hot holding area (like an insulated container).

- Keep food cold with ice packs. Don't let food sit out for more than two hours, or for one hour if the temperatures are higher than 90 degrees.
- Don't cross-contaminate. Wash fresh produce before cutting. Use clean utensils and wash/sanitize in between use. Store raw meat on the bottom shelf to avoid meat juices from dripping on other food. Wash your hands before, during and after handling food.

Grilling Safety

[Grilling](#) is a popular way to prepare food throughout the summer, but it can present some hazards. July is the most common month for [grill fires](#). Take these steps to ensure proper safety measures are followed:

- Always supervise a barbecue grill when in use. Don't add charcoal starter fluid when coals have already been ignited.
- Never grill indoors, that includes in your house, camper, tent or any enclosed area.
- Make sure everyone but the cook stays away from the grill, including children and pets.
- Keep the grill away from the house or anything that could catch fire.
- Use the long-handled tools especially made for cooking on the grill.

Water Safety

Pools, beaches, lakes and rivers can provide hours of enjoyment for adults and children. But many [dangers](#) exist around water. Everyone needs to be aware and take the necessary [precautions](#) to avoid potential injury or death.

- **Constantly supervise children** around water and avoid distractions. If you have a pool, secure it with appropriate barriers.
- **Designate a water watcher** whose sole responsibility is to [oversee the activity](#) in the water.
- **Wear U.S. Coast Guard-approved life jackets** around water, especially children and non-experienced swimmers. Do not rely on [life jackets](#) alone.
- **Don't swim alone** and only swim in designated areas supervised by lifeguards.
- **Reach or throw an object to the person** in trouble in the event of [an emergency](#). Don't go in! You could become a victim yourself.

For additional information on healthy and safe swimming, visit swimhealthyva.com.

Need more safety tips for Independence Day? Contact the Rappahannock Area Health District at <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/rappahannock/>