

Heat Advisory

Category: Heat

written by Jennifer Caputo-Seidler | August 14, 2023

“Heat advisory in effect 11 a.m. to 7 p.m.” The text from the city emergency alert system lit up my phone screen. A little while later, I saw a Facebook post from Denis Phillips, chief meteorologist for ABC News, telling Floridians this was only the second time in over 20 years that a heat advisory had been issued. I was scheduled to be the preceptor on a street medicine shift that night. My first reaction was regret at having signed up for an August “street run,” as we called it. My second was remembering that the run would be canceled without a preceptor—so, heat advisory or not, I knew I had to keep my commitment.

That evening, as the street run coordinator oriented new volunteers to the evening’s activities, I began sweating before we even left the parking lot. As we followed our usual route downtown, I was constantly aware of the sun on my skin; it was painful, despite my religious use of sunscreen. Sweat soaked through my t-shirt, ran into my eyes, and made my hair cling to my neck.

Every bit of shade was a godsend, a brief oasis from the sun, which remained steadfast even as it neared 8 p.m. I looked forward to returning to my car and cranking the A/C on full-blast for the drive home.

But what about the people I was out there serving? Where would they get relief? Some had taken to running through the city park fountain to cool off. They all bore signs of the heat wearing on them. Dehydration was a significant challenge. Multiple people were experiencing headaches. Most were sunburned, several badly so. Skin infections from the constant sweating and lack of public showers were rampant. We ran out of bug spray and body wipes halfway through our loop. The city had opened cooling centers, but none of them were in the downtown area, and none of the people we served that day had any way of getting to the centers that were open.

When I arrived back at my car, my cheeks burned. I couldn’t tell if it was from the heat or from the heartbreak of leaving all those people to deal with it.

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