Heat related deaths and illness are **preventable**. Yet, many people succumb to extreme heat. Historically, from 1979 to 1999, excessive heat exposure caused 8,015 deaths in the United States. During this period, more people in this country died from extreme heat than from hurricanes, lightning, tornadoes, floods, and earthquakes combined. In 2001, 300 deaths were caused by excessive heat exposure.

People suffer heat related illness when their bodies are unable to properly cool themselves. The body normally cools itself by sweating. Under some conditions, sweating is not enough. In such cases, a person’s body temperature rises rapidly. Very high body temperatures may damage the brain or other vital organs.

Several factors affect the body’s ability to cool itself during extremely hot weather. When the humidity is high, sweat will not evaporate as quickly, preventing the body from releasing heat quickly. Other risk factors include age, obesity, heart disease, sunburn, and prescription drug and alcohol use.

Air conditioning is the number one protective factor against heat related illness and death. If a home is not air conditioned, people can reduce their risk for heat related illness by spending time in public facilities that are air conditioned. Shopping malls and public libraries are good options. Even a few hours in a cool place can help your body stay cooler when you go back into the heat.

During hot weather you need to increase your fluid intake, regardless of your activity level. Don’t wait until you’re thirsty to drink. If your doctor generally limits the amount of fluid you drink or has you on water pills, ask how much you should drink while the weather is hot. Don’t drink liquids that contain caffeine, alcohol, or large amounts of sugar. These drinks cause you to loose body fluids. Very cold drinks should also be **avoided**. They can cause stomach cramps.

If outdoors, choose to wear lightweight, light colored, loose fitting clothing. Sunburn affects your body's ability to cool itself and causes a loss of body fluids. It also causes pain and damages the skin. Protect yourself from the sun by wearing a wide brimmed hat, which also keeps you cooler, and by putting on sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher thirty minutes before going outdoors. Read the package directions about how often to reapply the sunscreen.

If you must be outdoors, try to limit it to the morning and evening hours. If exertion in the heat makes your heart pound and leaves you gasping for breath, stop what you are doing. Get into a cool area, or at least into the shade, and rest.

Extreme heat can cause extreme problems for many people. Take care of yourself and others.

Always protect yourself from extreme heat.
Understanding

1. Who is most at risk to suffer from a heat related illness? __________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

2. What does the word avoid mean? ___________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

3. How does the body naturally cool itself? _____________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

4. What are some possible effects of a very high body temperature? ______________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

5. What drinks should be avoided in hot weather? Why? ________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

6. During what time of the day should a person avoid being outdoors? Why? ______________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

7. What does the word prevent/preventable mean? _____________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

8. How can you protect yourself from being a victim of the heat? _______________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

Writing

Option A:  Summarize the reading in your own words.
Option B:  How does heat affect you? How do you stay safe in extreme heat?
Option C:  Write about someone you know who has suffered a heat related illness.