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CAMPERS' NO. 1 DRILL: DRINK LOTS OF WATER

Coping with heat part of basics with youth sports

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Temperatures and emotions were running high as kids engaged in an intense outdoor soccer game, until . . .

"SPRINKLERS!" shouted coach Mike Keenan.

Campers and counselors at Skyhawks soccer camp in San Jose sprinted toward the sprinklers, whooping and yelling, for a much needed soaking.

This week's heat wave has been even more brutal for hundreds of young athletes participating in summer sports camps and team practices.

And avoiding health problems, from severe sunburn to heat stroke, requires extra vigilance on the part of parents, coaches and players.

Children in summer sports camps can easily become dehydrated, according to an American College of Sports Medicine study. On the last day of a three-day soccer camp in Pennsylvania, the study found 59 percent of boys and 70 percent of girls were significantly dehydrated. And heat and dehydration can lead to heat exhaustion or heat stroke, which can be fatal. Danger signs include fatigue, weakness, headache, confusion and, ultimately, unconsciousness.

Coaches are often at fault for not providing enough water breaks during practice or making players feel guilty about taking those breaks, said Douglas Casa, director of athletic training at the University of Connecticut and lead author of the study.

And young athletes don't always know they need a break.

"Children don't always understand and can't communicate what's wrong," said Chris Schwanzenberger, director of marketing for Skyhawks and a former coach. "Kids are still learning to understand what's going on in their bodies. Kids can get distracted. It's up to the coach and camp director to look after their needs."

Monday's high temperatures prompted the Sunnyvale Community Center to cancel an afternoon

soccer class.

The Milpitas Knights Youth Football League started practice Monday; but players won't start wearing their helmets until this weekend. It's just been too hot.

Santa Clara University's youth baseball camp took several breaks last week to cool down campers with the outfield hose, savor frozen treats and watch a short baseball movie indoors.

"Given the heat, you have to get a little more creative to try not keep them out there that long, but still make it fun," said Chris Daily, director of baseball operations.

At Gunn High School's summer football practices, head coach Matt McGinn keeps water bottles and buckets on the sidelines so players can drink between drills.

"Water is an important part of practice," he said Wednesday. "If you're not hydrated, then you can't perform." Drinking is always important, no matter how hot it is outside. But on days peaking at 90 to 100 degrees, players should drink water or a sports drink every 15 to 20 minutes, Casa said.

"If you wait to hydrate every hour, it's not enough," Casa said. "Frequent rest breaks are important for kids losing fluids."

Parents and coaches should also keep in mind that lack of wind and high humidity can intensify the effects of heat, said Jan Null, a meteorologist with Golden Gate Weather Services. High humidity makes it difficult for sweat to evaporate and cool the body.

How much liquid is enough? Catherine Albin, chief of pediatrics at Kaiser Permanente in Santa Clara, recommends that teenagers drink two liters of water on hot days even when they're inactive, four on a moderately active day, and six on a very active day.

It's also important to drink sports drinks such as Gatorade and Propel, she said: "These drinks have sodium and potassium, which you need in order to hold onto fluid in the body." Albin said hydration is especially important for younger children.

"For smaller children, the ratio of blood volume compared to the surface area is small, so they can have a lot of water loss," she said. "Also, their stomachs are smaller, so they need to drink frequently because they can't drink a lot."

Kids should also wear hats and shirts and apply sunscreen every few hours, she said.

"Kids put on sunscreen once and don't reapply," she said. "I've been seeing fair-skinned kids on their third peel for the summer. With all the sun exposure, it's a cancer risk." Some savvy young athletes have learned how to watch out for themselves. Nine-year-old Travis Dattilo, who goes to Terrell Elementary in San Jose, brings five one-pint water bottles with him to Skyhawks soccer camp every day.

"I used to bring three water bottles, but I told my mom that five waters is good," he said. He also brings a personal fan, 30 SPF sunscreen, a hat and towels.

"He knows what being dehydrated is like," said his mother, Kim Dattilo. "He doesn't want to get that way."