

Health and Medicine

Two bodies, both likely homeless, draw attention to summer health risks for the homeless

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Wayne Holland died Monday morning without shoes or a shirt.

He may have been cleaning up – or trying to escape the heat – when he fell into the [Sacramento River](#) near the I Street Bridge, which he was living under before he died, according to his brother Thomas Conway. Holland was 60 years old.

“He was a transient,” Conway said. “He’s been off and on doing that for years – he’s either there under a bridge or in prison. ... His family loved him, and we’re going to miss him. But we kind of expected to hear this one day.”

Holland, along with an unidentified male whose body also was discovered Monday off [Garden Highway](#) near Interstate 5, was one of two people found dead by police this week who were reported as possibly being homeless. Their deaths shed light on the high risk of mortality faced by those who live outside.

According to the Sacramento County Homeless Deaths Report, released in December 2013, approximately 38 percent of the 501 homeless people who died over 10 years in the county died outdoors. A map of the deaths studied indicates that homeless deaths are largely located in the downtown area and tend to follow transportation corridors.

The study also found that the number of homeless deaths remains consistent throughout the year. Bob Erlenbusch, executive director of the Sacramento Regional Coalition to End Homelessness and principal author of the report, said the elements continue to take a toll on the homeless regardless of the season.

Infections, cardiovascular disease and diabetes are just a few of the many preventable health issues that lead to homeless death, according to the study. The summer months usher in a slew of additional concerns, including fatigue, bug bites and dehydration, Erlenbusch said.

“Our community could do a better job recognizing that summer is just as brutal for people as winter,” he said. “Homeless people have every health issue (that)housed people do, it’s just exacerbated by being homeless.”

The daytime temperature is expected to break 100 degrees each day of this weekend and drop into the 60s at night. The county does not have plans to open a cooling center.

“If we have continued very hot weather and the nights continue to stay hot, we make a determination to open a cooling center,” said Chris Andis, county spokeswoman. “And in the meantime, we put out our standard messages about finding a cool place and avoiding vigorous activity during the day.”

But that can be difficult when trying to reach food and [health care](#) providers on foot, according to guests at Loaves & Fishes, the downtown facility that serves about 800 homeless people daily.

Rick Herrera, a 60-year-old veteran taking refuge in the shade Thursday, pointed to a cracked red scab on the suntanned skin of his left forearm – the remnants of what he suspected was a nasty spider bite.

“I was out in the elements with no tent – you’re just susceptible to anything,” he said. “I was gonna wait until fall to get a tent – in this type of weather you can sometimes ride it out – but then the skunks started stealing my food.”

The lack of adequate nutrition, shelter and regular health care take a toll on many at Loaves & Fishes, particularly those with pre-existing conditions such as diabetes,

asthma or mental disorders, said John Hallsten, a medical student who provides voluntary first aid at the shelter.

“I’ve seen some pretty swollen limbs and bloody body parts,” Hallsten said. “Sometimes people just have huge bleeding wounds on their faces and they just don’t notice them or don’t care. And if you don’t treat them, it can get bad.”

Adhering to medication dosages also poses a problem for transients, who often carry all of their possessions and misplace pill bottles and inhalers along the way. Sister Libby Fernandez, executive director of Loaves & Fishes, said she hopes health care for the homeless will improve as more of them apply for Medi-Cal, but even that will take some effort.

“Getting on a regular routine of maintaining your health or monitoring your health is very difficult for a homeless person,” Fernandez said. “We have a free Mercy clinic here, but it’s for episodic health care needs. We are really trying to help our homeless guests get qualified for insurance. But even if you qualify, how do you get to the doctors and make those appointments?”

Read more here: <http://www.sacbee.com/2014/07/25/6583542/two-bodies-both-likely-homeless.html#storylink=cpy>