

HEAT ILLNESS PREVENTION

What is heat stress?

Heat Stress is the exposure to extreme heat which can result in occupational illnesses and injuries. Heat stress can result in heat stroke, heat exhaustion, heat cramps, or heat rashes. By recognizing the signs and symptoms of heat stress employees can prevent the extreme effects of heat which can cause death or permanent disability.

What is heat rash?

Heat rash is a skin irritation caused by excessive sweating. It is most common in hot and humid work environments. The symptoms include clusters of pimples or small blisters that are most likely to occur on the neck and upper chest, in the groin, under the breasts, and in elbow creases.

What are heat cramps?

Heat cramps are spasms of the muscles caused when workers drink large quantities of water but fail to replace the body's salt loss. Heat cramps usually affect workers who sweat during strenuous activity, which depletes the body's salt and moisture levels. Pain or spasms usually occur in the abdomen, arms, or legs.

What is heat syncope?

Fainting (Heat syncope) is a light-headedness or dizziness that usually occurs with prolonged standing or sudden rising from a sitting or lying position. This is often a problem for workers who are not accustomed to a hot work environment.

What is Heat Exhaustion?

Heat exhaustion is the body's response to an excessive loss of water and salt, usually through excessive sweating and an employee's failure to drink enough fluids throughout the day. Symptoms may include nausea, heavy sweating, fatigue, dizziness or confusion, a pale complexion, moist skin, and muscle cramps.

What is Heat Stroke?

Heat stroke is the most serious heat-related disorder. It is caused by the failure of the body's internal mechanism to regulate its core temperature. Symptoms may include a body temperature that may reach 106 degrees Fahrenheit or higher, hot red dry skin, no sweating, hallucinations, confusion, rapid pulse, dizziness, or loss of consciousness.

What should you do?

Employees are at greater risk of suffering from heat illness when dehydrated, in poor health, not accustomed to working in the heat, or if they have previously suffered from heat stress. When possible, employees should avoid exposure to extreme heat, sun exposure, and high humidity. When these exposures cannot be avoided, take the following steps to prevent heat stress:

- Get out of the sun and find a cool resting place when you begin to overheat
- Wear light-colored, loose, lightweight, and breathable clothing
- Gradually build up to heavy work
- Schedule heavy work during the coolest parts of day
- Take more breaks when working in extreme heat and humidity
- Drink cool fresh water frequently – before and during work in the heat
- Avoid drinks with caffeine, alcohol, and large amounts of sugar
- Be aware that protective clothing or personal protective equipment may trap body heat and increase the risk of heat stress
- Monitor your physical condition and that of co-workers
- IMMEDIATELY tell a supervisor if you are getting sick from the heat

Lastly, discuss the symptoms of heat illness and how to keep an eye out for co-workers. The key during this extreme weather is to prevent heat exhaustion, heat cramps, fainting, or heat stroke. Remember, know where to find cool drinking water and take breaks when needed.

Cal/OSHA Information

<https://www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/heatillnessinfo.html>