

Heat stress

Explain dangers

When your body loses too much sweat through heavy labour or working under hot, humid conditions, you can become dehydrated. If your body doesn't have enough water to cool itself down, your temperature can rise above 38°C. That's when you can get a heat-related illness such as:

- Heat rash (plugged sweat glands)
- Heat cramps (salt loss from sweating)
- Heat exhaustion
- Heat stroke.

HEAT EXHAUSTION is when your body cannot keep blood flowing both to vital organs and to the skin for cooling.

Symptoms

- Weakness, feeling faint
- Headache
- Breathlessness
- Nausea or vomiting
- Difficulty continuing work.

Treatment

Get medical aid and cool down (move to a shaded area, loosen clothing, and drink cool water). It takes 30 minutes at least to cool the body down from heat exhaustion. If it's not treated quickly, it can lead to heat stroke.

HEAT STROKE is a serious medical emergency. You can die from it. Your body has used up all its water and salt and cannot cool itself. Your temperature rises to dangerous levels.

Symptoms

- Confusion and irrational behaviour
- Convulsions or loss of consciousness
- Lack of sweating—hot, dry skin
- High body temperature—40°C or more.

Treatment

If a co-worker shows symptoms of heat stroke, you should act fast.

- Call the local emergency number or get the worker to a hospital.

- Take steps to cool the worker down (e.g., put them in a tub of cool water or give them a cool shower, spray them with a hose, or wrap them in a cool, wet sheet and fan rapidly).
- If the worker is unconscious, don't give them anything to drink.

Identify controls

- When temperatures start to increase in the spring, your body needs to become used to working in the heat. Don't overdo it. Your body will gradually adjust to working in the heat over time.
- Wear light, loose clothing. Light-coloured garments absorb less heat from the sun.
- Use PPE that allows sweat to evaporate. Consider cooling vests and reflective clothing. If wearing a hardhat, wear a hardhat tail to protect the neck from direct sunlight.
- Drink at least 1 cup (250 ml) of water every half hour. Don't wait until you feel thirsty or until your regular break.
- Avoid coffee, tea, beer, or carbonated soft drinks that can make you go to the bathroom.
- Avoid eating hot, heavy meals that can increase your body temperature.
- Try to do any heavy, physical work earlier in the day, before it gets too hot. Seek shade and reduce time in the sun during peak temperatures.
- Be alert to any symptoms of heat stress in yourself and your co-workers.
- Remember that your physical condition can affect your ability to deal with the heat. Age, weight, fitness level, health conditions (e.g., heart disease or high blood pressure), recent illness, or medications can all affect your ability to withstand high temperatures.

Demonstrate

Show your crew the location of any cooling stations, water fountains, or shaded break areas on the site.

If your company has a heat stress policy, review it with them.