

RISK CONTROL CONSULTING

Heat Illness

Warmer temperatures signal an end to the winter and the beginning of outdoor work and play activities. These temperatures can also mean exposure to heat triggered illnesses. Certain indoor environments, such as laundry rooms, boiler rooms, and attics, can present hot and humid conditions which are just as dangerous as the outdoors.

The following Risk Alert is intended to help you prepare for and reduce the possibility of injury due to:

- Heat Stroke (Severe Heat Illness)
- Heat Exhaustion (Moderate Heat Illness)

Special Note

If you are requiring employees to wear face coverings (not respirators), due to COVID-19 outbreak, here are some tips to keep them cool:

- Use a spray bottle of cool water to cool exposed skin
- Keep towels in a cooler or soak in cool water and apply to face and neck
- Have several face coverings so you can change often
- Wear cooling vests

General Tips

Determine if your organization has a Heat Illness Prevention plan in place to address outdoor work or at-risk indoor job tasks. Some states (e.g. [California](#), [Washington](#), and [Minnesota](#)) have specific program requirements that employers must have in place to safeguard employees from this workplace hazard.

To reduce the chance of heat related illness, implement the following:

- Drink small amounts of water at regular intervals (every 15-20 minutes), avoiding alcohol and caffeine.
- Schedule the heaviest, most intensive work in cooler times of the day and take frequent rest breaks in cool/shaded areas.
- Understand the effect of humidity and heat index on the human body (see also Additional Tips below).
- Add workers to allow for rotation, to reduce workload, or to the shorten workday.
- Allow time for acclimatization of workers' bodies to gradually adjust to the increasing temperatures and reduce the effect of heat stress.
- Utilize engineering controls to keep worksite temperatures to adaptable levels. This can include fans, canopies, and shading of equipment operators to lessen the sun's intensity.
- Wear hats and loose lightweight clothing if the job allows. Try to take into account the effects of heat and humidity when selecting the type of PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) to be used.

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- Monitor the environmental conditions at least hourly and check worker response to the heated conditions. Workers may not realize there is a problem, or be hesitant to verbalize discomfort.
- Provide effective communication by voice or electronic means so employees can contact a supervisor when necessary. If electronic, ensure the signal is reliable.
- Provide monitoring of employees for heat illness symptoms through direct supervision, a buddy system, or regular communication with radio.
- Conduct pre-shift huddles to review protection measures against heat illness.
- Implement emergency response procedures in the event an employee suffers heat related illness.

Know the Signs and Symptoms

Employees with **mild heat illness** may exhibit fatigue or dizziness, rash, muscle spasms (also known as heat cramps), and changes in mental or physical performance. If not recognized and treated promptly, it can progress to moderate or severe heat illness.

Moderate heat illness (“Heat Exhaustion”) has more serious symptoms which can include:

- Excessive sweating
- Cold, clammy, moist, pale, or possibly flushed skin
- Pronounced thirst
- Extreme weakness or fatigue, headache
- Nausea and/or lack of appetite
- Rapid weak pulse, and even collapse

A person with mild or moderate symptoms should be moved to a cool, shaded place with circulating air. Have the person lay down with feet elevated, loosen their clothing, and provide small sips of cool water. A wet cloth on the skin or spray mist can aid in bringing down the body temperature. If symptoms do not improve, medical attention should be sought.

Severe heat illness (“Heat Stroke”) can be fatal unless emergency medical treatment is administered. If symptoms below are observed, call for medical help.

- Red, hot, dry skin
- Body temp 104+ degrees F (high fever)
- Possible seizures, unconsciousness (fainting), severe headache
- Vomiting
- Absence of perspiration
- Possible confusion

What to Do

- Heat Stroke is a life threatening condition that requires immediate medical attention. Contact Emergency Medical Services.
- Take steps to cool the victim immediately.
 - **Remove from the hot environment**, increase air circulation.

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- Loosen clothing, pour water or sponge with ice water soaked rags over entire body to cool immediately.

Additional Tips:

There are a number of pre-existing conditions/illnesses that **can** make a person more prone to heat illness:

- Age, Gender, Weight
- Health conditions (e.g. circulation issues, diabetes, diarrhea)
- Poor fitness
- Nutrition
- Alcohol and/or Drug Use (including prescription drugs)
- Certain prescription medications
- Prior heat illness

Knowing how these factors work can make the difference in detecting heat related illness before it's too late.

For additional information contact:

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