

Heat Illness Risk Reduction

When working in hot conditions, you must take special precautions in order to prevent heat illness. These precautions can greatly reduce the risk of you developing heat illness.

Heat illness results from a combination of factors including environmental temperature and humidity, direct radiant heat from the sun or other sources, air speed, and workload. Personal factors, such as age, weight, level of fitness, medical condition, use of medications and alcohol, and acclimatization affect how well the body deals with excess heat.

Below, you will find five (5) heat illness precautions:

1. Recognize the Hazard

Check the weather forecast for the heat index; know how hot it will be. Be cautious of high relative humidity. Schedule your work so that the majority of it can be done during the cooler parts of the day.

2. Water

If you are going to be working in the heat you need to drink four (4) eight-ounce glasses of water per hour, including at the start of the shift, in order to replace the water lost to sweat. Many people can be very dehydrated and not feel thirsty at all. Avoid consuming liquids that contain caffeine, alcohol, or large amounts of sugar, for these will actually dehydrate you. Also, avoid very cold drinks, for they may cause stomach cramps.

3. Shade and Rest Breaks

Shade means blockage of direct sunlight. The direct heat of the sun can add as much as 15 degrees to the heat index. Heat-related illness occurs due to a combination of environmental and internal heat that cannot be adequately dissipated. Rest breaks in shade are important for cooling, and provide an opportunity to consume water. Shaded areas should block the sunlight and be either ventilated or open to air movement. Avoid sources of shade such as metal sheds or parked cars that are hot from sitting in the sun.

4. Acclimatization

You need time for your body to adjust to working in heat. This "acclimatization" is particularly important for workers (1) returning to work after a prolonged absence or recent illness, (2) recently moving from a cool to a hot climate, or (3) working during the beginning stages of a heat wave.

5. Prompt Medical Attention

Recognizing the symptoms of heat illness and providing an effective response requires promptly acting on early warning signs. Common early symptoms and signs of heat illness include headache, muscle cramps, and unusual fatigue. However, progression to more serious illness can be rapid and can include unusual behavior, nausea/vomiting, weakness, rapid pulse excessive sweating or hot dry skin, seizures, and fainting or loss of consciousness. **Any of these symptoms require immediate medical attention.**

When we share the responsibility for safety in the workplace, everyone wins!!