

Avoid the Risks of Heat

As temperatures rise, so does the risk of heat-related illness. Working in extreme heat can be hazardous, whether working in your yard at home or out on a work site. According to the Center of Disease Control, heat-related illnesses have resulted in 80,000 U.S. deaths over the past 20 years. Heat-related illness can be the result of a combination of factors including environmental temperature and humidity, direct radiant heat from the sun or other sources, and air speed. 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.

The best defense against heat-related illnesses is prevention. Here are some simple steps you can take to prevent heat-related illness while working in the heat:

Recognize the Hazard – plan your work:

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. Wear loose fitting, light-colored clothing and a wide-brimmed hat, when feasible.

Stay Hydrated:

Your body naturally cools itself through sweat. If you fail to replace the water in your body, you will lose your ability to sweat and your body will go into a dehydrated state. Many people can be very dehydrated and not feel thirsty at all. Be sure to hydrate your body with plenty of water. While working in hot environments, you should consume 4 eight-ounce glasses of water per hour, including when you begin your work in order to replace the water you will lose to sweat. 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.

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.

Types of Heat-related Illnesses:

Recognizing the symptoms of heat-related illness and providing an effective response requires promptly acting on early warning signs.

Heat Rash may occur in hot and humid environments where sweat is not easily removed from the surface of the skin by evaporation.

Heat Cramps, painful spasms of the muscles, are caused when a person drinks large quantities of water but fails to replace their bodies' salt loss. Salt can be replenished through a healthy diet and by occasionally consuming sport drinks. Salt tablets should NEVER be used! Taking salt tablets can raise blood pressure, cause stomach ulcers, and seriously affect workers with heart disease.

Fainting may be a problem for someone who is not acclimated to a hot environment who simply stands still in the heat.

Heat Exhaustion results from loss of fluid through sweating when a person has failed to drink enough fluids. Someone with heat exhaustion still sweats but experiences extreme weakness or unusual fatigue, giddiness, muscle cramps, nausea, or headache. The skin is clammy and moist, the complexion pale or flushed, and the body temperature normal or slightly higher. **Any combination of these symptoms requires immediate attention.**

Heat Stroke, the most serious health problem in hot environments, is caused by the failure of the body's internal mechanism to regulate its core temperature. Sweating stops and the body can no longer rid itself of excess heat. Signs include (1) mental confusion, delirium, loss of consciousness, convulsions or coma; (2) a body temperature of 106 degrees F or higher; (3) hot dry skin which may be red, mottled, or bluish. **Any combination of these symptoms requires immediate medical treatment.**

Those at Greater Risk:

Although any one at any time can suffer from heat-related illness, some people are at greater risk than others. Those at greater risk are:

- Children under 4 years of age/adults aged 65 or older.
- People who have a mental illness.
- Those who are overweight.
- Those who are physically ill, especially with heart disease or high blood pressure.

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