



SAFETY TALK

WORKING IN HOT WEATHER



The summer season can present unique hazards for those working outdoors in the hot weather. The combination of heat, humidity and physical labour can lead to a variety of heat-related illnesses. Proper protection and simple precautions can often prevent these types of illnesses and save lives.

Hazards caused by working in hot weather...

Heat edema is swelling that occurs when not acclimatized to hot working conditions. Swelling is most noticeable in the ankles.

Heat rashes are tiny red spots on the skin which cause a prickling sensation during heat exposure. The spots are the result of inflammation caused when the ducts of sweat glands become plugged.

Heat cramps are painful spasms of the muscles. The spasms are caused by the failure of the body to replace its lost body salts & usually occur after heavy sweating.

Heat exhaustion is caused by loss of body water and salt through excessive sweating. Signs/symptoms include heavy sweating, weakness, dizziness, intense thirst, nausea, headache, vomiting, diarrhea, muscle cramps, breathlessness, palpitations, tingling & numbness of hands & feet.

Heat syncope is heat-induced giddiness & fainting induced by temporarily insufficient flow of blood to the brain while a person is standing. It is caused by the loss of body fluids through sweating & lowered blood pressure due to pooling of blood in the legs.

Heat stroke & hyperthermia are the most serious types of heat illnesses & require immediate medical attention. Signs of heat stroke include body temperature often greater than 41 degrees C, and complete or partial loss of consciousness. The signs of heat hyperthermia are similar except that the skin remains moist. Sweating is not a good symptom of heat stress as there are two types of heat stroke.

- **Classical** - little or no sweating (occurs in children, persons who are chronically ill & the elderly)
- **Exertional** – body temperature rises due to strenuous exercise or work & sweating is usually present.

How can heat related illnesses be prevented?

Employers have a duty to take every reasonable precaution to ensure the workplace is safe for the worker. This duty includes taking effective measure to protect workers from heat stress disorders where work is done outdoors. Workers are also responsible for ensuring their own health, safety & well-being.

Follow these simple tips to reduce your chances of a heat-related injury:

Drink water: A person working in a hot environment loses water and salt through sweat. This loss should be compensated by water intake equal to the fluid loss. Plenty of cool drinking water should be available on the job site and workers should be encouraged to drink water ever 15 to 20 minutes even if they do not feel thirsty.

Wear light, loose fitting clothing: Wear light colored, loose fitting clothing that permits sweat evaporation but stops radiant heat. Tightly woven clothing that you cannot see through is best.

Protect yourself from the sun: Use sunscreen with sun protection factor of at least 15 to block 93% of UV rays. Wearing UV-absorbent sunglasses as well as wearing a hat helps to reduce sun exposure.

Allow flexibility: Make sure to take regular, frequent breaks and permit less physically demanding activities during peak temperature periods. Rest periods in a cooler area can easily prevent or reduce heat-related illnesses.

It's easy to get caught up in the job and forget about the importance of staying hydrated and taking regular breaks. Watch for signs of heat illness in yourself and your co-workers, and report any symptoms to your supervisor right away!