

Protecting Your Workers From Heat-Related Illness



Heat-related illness is any disorder caused by environmental exposure to heat. High temperatures can raise the body's internal temperature to dangerous levels. Without heat illness training, workers may be unaware of their vulnerability to heat-related illness and injury.

Warning signs of heat illness are:

- Confusion
- Cramps
- Dizziness

- Exhaustion
- Fainting
- Headaches
- Muscle aches
- Rashes
- Vomiting
- Hallucinations
- Profuse sweating accompanied by wet, red skin
- No sweating accompanied by dry, red skin (This is extremely dangerous.)

Who is at risk for heat illness?

Employees who work outside in hot weather, such as construction and agricultural workers, are especially susceptible to heat-related illness. So are those who work in hot indoor environments, like factories and boiler rooms.

New employees and those returning from time off may be at the highest risk for heat-related illness. Their bodies need time to acclimate to the environment. Workers who are older or overweight may also face a higher risk.

Awareness training and prevention programs are key to protection

The best way to protect your workers is to make them aware of the signs and symptoms of heat illness so they can monitor themselves and their coworkers. Have a plan to address sick workers. Make sure your employees know how to access cooling areas, how to administer basic first aid and when to call for medical help.

Establish a complete heat illness prevention program

Good communication between workers and their safety personnel and supervisors is central to preventing heat-related illness. Encourage workers to speak to their supervisor if they feel conditions are putting them at risk.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) provides [training tools and educational resources](#) to use in your own prevention program.

Ensure workers stay cool, hydrated and safe

Here are some basic prevention tips from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and OSHA:

- Have water facilities near every worker on every job site.
- Provide employees access to air-conditioned areas, even when outdoors.
- Allow workers multiple breaks to drink at least one pint of water per hour.
- Schedule appropriate work cycles or increase staff during heat waves.
- Encourage workers to:
 - Eat snacks or meals regularly to replenish their electrolytes
 - Wear loose-fitting, lightweight clothing so their bodies cool properly
 - Use sunscreen, hats and sunglasses (Sunburns affect the body's ability to cool itself.)
 - Avoid caffeinated beverages since they cause dehydration

What to do when a worker is ill from the heat

- Move the worker to a cooler, shaded area and stay with them until help arrives.
- Remove outer clothing, and fan and mist them with water.
- Apply ice packs or iced towels to lower their internal temperature.
- Provide cool drinking water, if they are able to drink.
- Call 911 and apply ice if they are not alert or seem confused. These are signs of heatstroke.

Prevention is the best medicine

Once your workers are aware of the dangers and know how to prevent heat-related illness, they can stay properly hydrated and nourished to reduce the impact of heat exposure.

Sahouri Insurance
advocacy@sahouri.com

Sahouri Insurance
8200 Greensboro Dr
STE 1550
McLean, VA 22102
www.sahouri.com



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