

Risk Manager

Answers, resources and information to help assess and reduce risk

Heat Related Illnesses...Beware of the Dog Days of Summer! By Kyle Stewart

Many workers spend some part of their working day in a hot environment which may lead to a dangerous medical condition or death if workers are not aware of the threat of heat-related illnesses (i.e., heat stroke, heat exhaustion, etc.). Heat-related illnesses are caused when an individual is subjected to extreme temperatures and humidity which results in the body's inability to regulate and control body temperature. Although, workers should be aware of temperature and humidity, several contributing factors should be considered to prevent heat-related illnesses. These factors include; but are not limited to, personal characteristics such as age, weight, fitness, medical condition and acclimatization to the heat; physical exertion of the task(s) performed; clothing worn; and inadequate hydration. Most importantly, training workers to recognize the signs and symptoms of heat-related illnesses and what actions to take to prevent and/or control these disorders should be reviewed annually. Below is a basic overview of the symptoms of heat-related illnesses and steps to take to prevent these disorders.

Heat Stroke: (Most serious of the heat-related illnesses)

- Heat stroke occurs when the body becomes unable to control its core temperature; the body's temperature rises rapidly and sweating ceases.
- Symptoms of Heat Stroke:
 - o Hot, dry skin or profuse sweating
 - o Slurred speech
 - o Confusion/dizziness
 - o Throbbing headache
- First Aid:
 - o Call 911 immediately, never leave the worker unattended.
 - o Move to a cool shaded area.
 - o Attempt to cool and lower the body temperature

by soaking their clothes in water, placing ice in the groin, arm pits and back of the neck.

Heat Exhaustion:

- Heat exhaustion is the body's response to an excessive loss of water and salt through sweating.
- Symptoms of Heat Exhaustion:
 - o Heavy sweating
 - o Extreme weakness, fatigue, dizziness/confusion
 - o Nausea and/or muscle cramps
 - o Clammy, moist skin, pale or flushed complexion
- First Aid:
 - o Have the worker rest in a cool, shaded or air-conditioned area.
 - o Drink plenty of water or other cool beverages; limit intake of caffeine.
 - o Monitor symptoms, if no sign of improvement within 1-hour, seek medical attention.

Steps to prevent heat-related illnesses include:

- Refer to the "Heat Index", which accounts for temperature and humidity; the higher the heat index, the hotter it will feel. The risk of heat-related illnesses is greater when the Heat Index is above 91° F because sweat does not efficiently evaporate and cool the skin, which prevents the body from cooling itself.
 - Gradually acclimatize your body to working in hot environments.
 - Schedule physically demanding jobs for the cooler part of the day, if able.
 - Provide cool water/liquids and provide additional rest periods with water breaks.
 - o Rest breaks should be taken in the shade or a canopy provided.

- Drink small amounts of water frequently (approximately 1 cup every 15 minutes) as opposed to a large quantity of liquids at one time.
- Wear light-colored, loose fitting, breathable clothing.
- Be aware that protective clothing or personal protective equipment may increase the risk of heat-related illnesses.

Additional resources:

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

For additional information or training on best practices and safety management within your school entity, please contact Director of Risk Management Sharon Orr at (866) 401-6600, ext. 7152 or sorr@cmregent.com.