



TOOLBOX TALK: Heat Safety

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During this time of year, it is important to be reminded constantly about heat related illnesses including the cause, symptoms and preventative measures for heat related illnesses.

When a person works in a hot environment, the body gets rid of excess heat to maintain a stable internal temperature by circulating blood to the skin and through sweating. When the air temperature is close to or warmer than normal body temperature, cooling of the body becomes more difficult. Blood circulating to the skin cannot lose its heat and sweating becomes the main way the body cools off. However, sweating is only effective if the humidity level is low enough to allow evaporation, and if the fluids and salts that are lost are replaced adequately.

The body stores excessive heat that it cannot get rid of which then causes the body's core temperature to rise and the heart rate to increase. As the body continues to store heat, the person can then begin to show symptoms of heat related illnesses such as heat rash, heat cramps, heat exhaustion and heat stroke.

Illness	Severity	Symptoms	Treatment
Heat Rash	Mild	Rash Discomfort	Change clothes Use powder or medicated cream
Heat Cramps	Mild	Cramps in muscles such as legs, back and abdomen	Take electrolyte tablets, drinks with electrolytes such as Gatorade or eat potato chips or pretzels

Heat Exhaustion	Serious	Profuse sweating Cool, moist skin Dizziness Nausea Weakness and fatigue Ringing in the ears Intense headaches Weak, rapid pulse Muscle cramps	Rest in the shade or air conditioning Drink plenty of water Get medical attention if you have no improvement in an hour
Heat Stroke	Severe (could cause death if untreated)	Red, patchy, dry skin Could cause altered behavior Disorientation Excessive body temperature (core temp in excess of 104 F) Headache Rapid breathing Racing pulse	CALL 911 Cool the body using any means possible - shade, air conditioning, and removing or wetting the clothing

Heat related illnesses can be prevented by following the guidelines below;

- **Work up to the heat.** It can take up to two (2) weeks to get used to working in a hot environment. Work hours should be gradually increased so a worker’s body gets accustomed to the heat. New workers are at a greater risk for heat related illnesses.
- Avoid drinking alcoholic beverages the night before a hot day because it will leave you dehydrated.
- Drink plenty of water throughout the day. Eight (8) ounces every 15 minutes is suggested. **DO NOT WAIT UNTIL YOU FEEL THIRSTY TO DRINK.**
- Alternate water and a drink with electrolytes such as Gatorade
- Get plenty of sleep and eat well.
- Avoid caffeine.
- Take breaks in a shady area. Put up tents to allow a place for breaks to cool down.
- Use fans around the work area and in tents if possible.
- Wear loose-fitting shirts, preferably cotton material. Some think that wearing long-sleeve shirts keep you cooler.
- Wearing a hat may keep you cooler.
- Use “cooling towels” around your neck and cooling inserts for hard hats.

- Notify your supervisor immediately if you are not feeling well. Do not wander off alone without someone knowing ***because your condition could deteriorate quickly!***

Exposure to heat can also increase the risk of other injuries because of sweaty palms, fogged-up safety glasses, dizziness and burns from hot surfaces or steam.

Know the facts about heat related illnesses and educate others!

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(NRCA ToolboxTalks & OSHA Safety and Health Topics)