

Heat stress

Risk Control Services from Liberty Mutual Insurance

What to know before you give your talk

Every year we hear reports of people who become ill or die because of heat and humidity. Excessive heat can result in heat illnesses, decreased worker productivity, and can increase the likelihood of accidents.

What the crew should know

There are three types of heat illnesses: heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke

These are the signs:

1. Heat cramps are brief, periodic cramps in the muscles of the arms, legs, or abdomen.
2. Heat exhaustion presents as tiredness, weakness, thirst, and dizziness, with occasional headache, nausea, diarrhea, and fainting. The skin is moist.
3. Heat stroke is life-threatening and characterized by confusion, delirium, loss of consciousness, convulsions, coma, and hot, dry skin.

Ways to help outdoor workers prevent heat illnesses.

- Frequently drink plenty of fluids, especially water. Drinking a glass of water every 15 – 20 minutes when temperatures are high is more effective in preventing dehydration than larger amounts taken less frequently. Drink water frequently before becoming thirsty to maintain good hydration.
- Take frequent breaks in shaded and cool areas. Use scheduled work-rest cycles, and rest long enough to recover from the heat.
- Wear lightweight, loose-fitting clothing made of breathable materials like cotton. Consider wearing a long-sleeved shirt that will serve as a shield from the sun's rays.
- Acclimate to the work environment by gradually increasing work time and activities in hot conditions.
- Avoid alcohol or stimulants when performing heavy physical activity in hot environments.
- If symptoms of heat exhaustion develop, report the situation to your supervisor immediately and go to a cooler area of the work site. First aid and/or physician care may be necessary.
- Heat stroke is an immediate threat to life. Cooling with cold water or ice should begin at once. At the same time, medical aid should be called.

Demonstration

Share the locations of cool, potable water near the work area, and share where workers can rest in the shade during breaks.

Get them talking

- Has anyone ever had heat stroke, or know someone who has? What did you observe?
- What are you going to do to avoid a heat-related illness?

