

# HEAT STRESS

Every year, thousands of employees become ill from occupational heat exposure; some cases even result in serious illness or death. Heat illnesses and deaths are preventable and the risk of developing them can be reduced.

Heat stress is a condition caused by elevated body temperature; when precautions are not taken, body temperature can rise to dangerous levels. Heat illnesses include heat rash, heat cramps, heat exhaustion and heat stroke.

If a worker becomes ill from the heat, it is important to call a supervisor for help. If possible, move the worker to a shady area and remove outer layers of clothing. If water is available and the worker is alert, provide drinking water. If the worker is not alert or seems confused, this may be a heat stroke. Call 911 immediately and apply ice as soon as possible.

## RISK FACTORS

Risk factors that may result in heat stress include:

- High temperature and humidity
- Direct sun exposure
- No breeze or wind
- Low liquid intake
- Heavy physical labor
- Wearing waterproof clothing
- Employees not acclimated to hot environments

## SYMPTOMS

- Headache
- Dizziness or fainting
- Weakness and wet skin
- Irritability or confusion
- Thirst, nausea or vomiting
- Excessive sweating
- Skin dry and hot to touch

## EMPLOYER RECOMMENDATIONS

There are precautions employers should take any time temperatures are high and their employees have jobs involving physical work.

- Provide training about the hazards leading to heat stress and how to prevent them
- Provide plenty of cool water to workers close to the work area; at least one pint of water per hour is needed
- Take steps that help workers become acclimated to high temperatures, especially workers who are new to the environment by gradually increasing workloads and allow more frequent breaks during the first few days
- Rotating job functions among workers can help minimize overexertion and heat exposure
- Have an emergency plan in place that specifies what to do if a worker has signs of heat-related illness and ensures medical services are available if needed

## EMPLOYEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Workers should be aware of all signs and symptoms of heat illness. Taking precautionary measures such as blocking out direct sun and other heat sources can aid in staying cool. Wearing lightweight, light-colored and loose-fitting clothing will provide assistance in keeping the body cool. For these reasons and more, it is important for the worker to monitor themselves and others for the symptoms and signs associated with heat stress.