

Preventing & Treating Heat-Related Disorders When Working in Hot Conditions

Work performed during the hotter months of the year can quickly develop into life-threatening situations if workers do not take frequent breaks from the heat and do not drink enough water. Heat exhaustion can progress to heat stroke, and even death, if appropriate measures are not taken to keep the body temperature at a safe level.

It is important to know how to recognize the signs and symptoms of heat-related disorders and how to treat those disorders. Be sure to review the following information with both management and employees:

Heat Exhaustion – Be aware and take action to prevent progression to heat stroke.

Signs/symptoms:

- Heavy sweating
- Extreme weakness or fatigue
- Dizziness, confusion
- Nausea
- Clammy, moist skin
- Pale or flushed complexion
- Muscle cramps
- Slightly elevated body temperature
- Fast and shallow breathing

Treatment:

- Have the worker rest in a cool, shaded or air-conditioned area
- Have the worker drink plenty of water or other cool, non-alcoholic beverages
- Have the worker take a cool shower, bath or sponge bath

Heat Stroke – Can be FATAL. Emergency treatment needed.

Sign/symptoms:

- Hot, dry skin or profuse sweating
- Hallucinations
- Chills
- Throbbing headache
- High body temperature
- Confusion, dizziness
- Slurred speech



Treatment:

- Call 911 and notify the worker's supervisor
- Move the sick worker to a cool shaded area
- Cool the worker using methods such as:
 - Soaking their clothes with water
 - Spraying, sponging or showering them with water
 - Fanning their body

Prevention

Implementing a heat-related illness prevention plan can aid in preventing heat disorders while on the job. A good heat-related illness prevention program could contain the following elements, however, each work environment may not require all elements.

1. Clear responsibilities of the employer and employees regarding working in hot, humid conditions
2. Recognizing the environment and personal health factors that could contribute to heat-related illness
3. Procedures for measuring air temperature and documenting effects of other environmental factors (humidity, wind strength, work location). Reference: OSHA Heat Safety Tool smart phone app.
4. Guidelines for a heat-acclimatization process
5. Daily water or fluid requirements and management of the water or fluid intake process
6. Training on the recognition of signs and symptoms of heat-related illnesses
7. A reporting process if signs and symptoms are observed
8. Establishing first aid procedures
9. Establishing emergency response procedures
10. Training for supervision and employees on the requirements of the program

With proper training and supervision of employees working in hot conditions, you can prevent unnecessary tragedies from occurring at your place of business. If you have any questions related to this topic, please feel free to contact us at losscontrol@firstbenefits.org for assistance.