

Heat Stress in the Workplace

Summer is almost here...



Working in extreme heat and hot environments may put you at risk of heat stress. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), exposure to extreme heat has affected an average of 658 people each year. Some are at greater risk of injury including those who are 65 years of age or older, are overweight, have heart disease or high blood pressure, or take certain medications. Heat stress can result in heat-related injuries such as heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke. Below are descriptions of the warning signs and symptoms of each heat illness.

- **Heat cramps** usually affect workers who sweat a lot during strenuous activity. This sweating depletes the body's salt and moisture levels. Low salt levels in muscles cause painful cramps. Symptoms include muscle spasms, and pain, in the abdomen, arms, or legs.
- **Heat exhaustion** is your body's response to an excessive loss of water and salt usually through excessive sweating. Symptoms include headache, nausea, dizziness, weakness, irritability, thirst, heavy sweating and elevated body temperature.
- **Heat stroke** occurs when your body becomes unable to control its temperature: your body temperature will rise rapidly, sweating mechanisms will fail, and your body is unable to cool down. When heat stroke occurs, your body temperature can rise to 106°F or higher within 10-15 minutes. Symptoms include confusion, loss of consciousness, hot/dry skin, seizures, and high body temperature.

Tips for Success When Talking to Your Team

Preparation is Key: Keep the topic relevant. Work with your team to review common heat injuries in your workplace and discuss how they can be avoided.

Stay Positive: Keep the focus on what can be done to create a safe work place, instead of focusing on what has gone wrong in the past.

Share a Story, Ask for a Story: Storytelling is a powerful method to convey information. Stories from your employees make the topic even more relatable.

Defeat the heat!



During extreme heat, it is easy to forget about your well-being when working to complete a job. Understand your limits, allow more frequent breaks, and gradually increase workloads to adapt to the heat. Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated, even if you don't feel thirsty. If in the heat for less than 2 hours and involved in moderate work activities, drink 1 cup (8 oz.) of water every 15-20 minutes. Heat injuries can occur even if exposed for a short period of time. You should exercise frequently, avoid alcohol, and drinks with high caffeine or sugar, and immediately seek medical attention if symptoms occur.

Groundskeeper Ken Roberts takes frequent breaks from mowing grass to cool off on hot days



Our Northwestern Groundskeeping personnel defeat the heat by providing hydration stations, take breaks in shaded areas, or an air conditioned rooms or vehicles and schedule strenuous activities when the heat index is at its lowest levels, such as mornings and evenings. These minor changes can prevent the onset of heat related illnesses.

Training is key

Learn more: Complete *Heat Stress in the Workplace* training at learn.northwestern.edu

Safety at Home

With the hot summer months beginning, consider these safety tips to protect you and your family:

- ✓ Never leave infants, children, and pets in a parked car, temperatures can get dangerous very quickly even if windows are left open.
- ✓ Schedule outdoor sports and exercises earlier or later in the day when the temperature is cooler and drink plenty of water before and after activities.
- ✓ Use your stove and oven less to maintain a cooler temperature in your home.
- ✓ Avoid hot and heavy meals.

For Additional Information

Contact Gwen Butler, Director, Environmental Health & Safety, at 847.491.4936