



# Heat Illness Prevention Campaign Talking Points

## Purpose and Background

- OSHA's Heat Illness Prevention campaign, launched in 2011, educates employers and workers on the dangers of working in the heat.

## Dangers of Working in the Heat

- Hazardous heat exposure can happen indoors or outdoors and can occur during any season if the conditions are right, not only during heat waves.
- Although illness from exposure to heat is preventable, every year, thousands of workers become sick from occupational heat exposure, and some cases are fatal.
- 50% to 70% of outdoor heat fatalities occur in the first few days of working in warm or hot environments because the body needs to acclimatize, or build a tolerance to the heat gradually over time.
- In a warm environment, the human body relies on its ability to get rid of excess heat through sweating and increased blood flow to the skin (i.e., heat dissipation). When the human body is unable to maintain a normal temperature, heat illnesses can occur and may result in death.
- Heat-related illnesses can have a substantial cost to workers and employers, including decreased performance, lost productivity due to illness and hospitalization, and possibly death.

## Risk Factors

- Heat illnesses can affect anyone, regardless of age or physical condition.
- New and returning workers need to build tolerance to heat (acclimatize) and take frequent breaks.
- Occupational factors that may contribute to heat illness include high temperature and humidity, low fluid consumption, direct sun exposure (with no shade), extreme heat indoors, limited air movement (no breeze), physical exertion, and use of bulky protective clothing and equipment.
- Personal risk factors that may cause some workers to be more susceptible to heat-related illness include medical conditions, lack of physical fitness, previous episodes of heat-related illness, alcohol consumption, drugs, and use of certain medication.

## Signs and Symptoms

- Heat stroke is the most severe heat-related illness. The signs of heat stroke are abnormal thinking or behavior (e.g., confusion), unconsciousness (i.e., passing out), slurred speech, and seizures. A high body temperature (>104°F) is also common.
- Heat stroke is a medical emergency that may result in death. Call 911 immediately, cool the worker with ice or cold water, and stay with the worker until help arrives.
- Heat exhaustion is the next most serious heat related health problem. The following signs and symptoms are typical of heat exhaustion: tiredness or weakness, dizziness or lightheadedness,





headache, thirst, decreased urine output, nausea or vomiting, heavy sweating, or hot, dry skin. Workers with heat exhaustion may also have an elevated body temperature (>100.4°F).

- Workers with heat exhaustion should be moved to a cooler area. Remove unnecessary clothing. Cool the worker with ice, a fan, or frequent sips of water. A person with heat illness may not experience all the signs and symptoms listed. If symptoms worsen, do not leave the worker alone, call 911, and get help immediately.

### **Prevention**

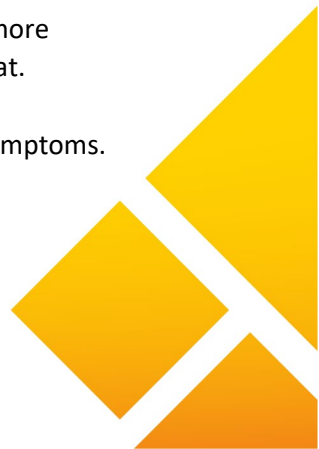
- Provide sufficient rest, shade or cool space, and fluids.
- New and returning workers need to build tolerance (acclimatize) and take frequent breaks. Follow the 20% rule. On the first day, work no more than 20% of the shift's duration at full intensity in the heat. Increase the duration of time at full intensity by no more than 20% a day until workers are used to working in the heat.
- Engineering controls such as air conditioning with cooled air, and increased air flow, leading to increased evaporative cooling, can make the workplace safer.
- Other options for keeping body temperatures down in warm environments include making changes to workload and schedules (e.g., work shorter shifts, schedule work earlier or later in the day, limit strenuous work, or take frequent breaks).
- Proper hydration (e.g., drinking 1 cup [8 oz.] of water or sports drink every 15–20 minutes).
- Wear a hat and light-colored, loose-fitting, and breathable clothing if possible.
- Monitor yourself and others for signs of heat illness.

### **COVID and Heat**

- Acclimatize new and returning workers to environmental and work conditions while wearing cloth face coverings.
- Wear cloth face coverings that are comfortable and breathable, and that fit properly. Change your cloth face covering if it gets wet.
- Verbally check on others frequently for signs of heat illness.

### **Employer Responsibility**

- Under OSHA law, employers are responsible for providing workplaces free of known safety hazards, including protecting workers from extreme heat.
- Employers should create a heat illness plan to protect workers from developing heat-related illnesses by:
  - Providing workers with water, rest, and a shady or cool space.
  - Allowing new or returning workers to gradually increase workloads and take more frequent breaks as they acclimatize, or build a tolerance for working in the heat.
  - Planning for heat emergencies.
  - Training supervisors and workers to recognize heat hazards and heat illness symptoms.
  - Monitoring workers for signs of heat illness and calling 911 when needed.





- All symptoms of heat illness should be taken seriously, especially during a worker's first few days. Workers who develop symptoms should be allowed to stop working and should receive evaluation for possible heat-related illness.
- Management should commit to preventing heat-related illness for all workers regardless of their heat tolerance levels.

### **Worker Rights and Protections**

- Federal law entitles you to a safe workplace. You have the right to speak up about hazards (e.g., heat) without fear of retaliation. If you believe working conditions are unsafe, visit <https://www.osha.gov/workers> for information on how to file a confidential complaint with OSHA and ask for an inspection.

### **Resources**

1. <https://www.osha.gov/heat>
2. [https://www.osha.gov/dts/osta/otm/otm\\_iii/otm\\_iii\\_4.html03101996](https://www.osha.gov/dts/osta/otm/otm_iii/otm_iii_4.html03101996)
3. <https://nihhis.cpo.noaa.gov/>
4. <https://www.osha.gov/heat-exposure>
5. <https://www.osha.gov/heat-exposure/illness-first-aid>
6. [https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/publications/heat\\_stress.pdf](https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/publications/heat_stress.pdf)
7. <https://www.osha.gov/heat-exposure/prevention>

