

Heat Stress Tips For Employers & Employees

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) offers information about recognizing, evaluating and controlling heat stress with these ten tips for workers and employers:

1. Drink cool water. Anyone working in a hot environment should drink cool water in small amounts frequently -- one cup every 20 minutes. Employers should make water available. Avoid alcohol, coffee, tea and caffeinated soft drinks, which cause dehydration.
2. Dress appropriately. Wear lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing and change clothing if it gets completely saturated. Use sunscreen and wear a hat when working outdoors. Avoid getting sunburn.
3. Work in ventilated areas. All workplaces should have good general ventilation as well as spot cooling in work areas of high heat production. Good airflow increases evaporation of sweat, which cools the skin.
4. Work less, rest more. Supervisors should assign a lighter workload and longer rest periods during days of intense heat. Short, frequent work-rest cycles are best. Alternate work and rest periods with longer rest periods in a cooler area, and schedule heavy work for cooler parts of the day.
5. Ask how workers are feeling. Supervisors should monitor workplace temperature and humidity and check workers' responses to heat at least hourly. Allow a large margin of safety for workers. Be alert to early signs of heat-related illness and allow workers to stop their work for a rest break if they become extremely uncomfortable.
6. Know the signs and take prompt action. Employees and employers should learn to spot the signs of heat stroke, which can be fatal. Get emergency medical attention immediately if someone has one or more of the following symptoms:
 - Mental confusion or loss of consciousness, flushed face, hot, dry skin or has stopped sweating.
7. Train first-aid workers. First aid workers should be able to recognize and treat the signs of heat stress. First aid workers should also be able to recognize the signs and symptoms of heat exhaustion, heat cramps and other heat-related illness. Be sure that all workers know who is trained to give first aid.
8. Reduce work for anyone at risk. Employers should use common sense when determining fitness for work in hot environments. Lack of acclimatization, age, obesity, poor conditioning, pregnancy, inadequate rest, previous heat injuries, certain medical conditions and medications are some factors that increase susceptibility to heat stress.
9. Check with your doctor. Certain medical conditions such as heart conditions, diabetes and some medications can increase the risk of injury from heat exposure. Employees with medical conditions or those who take medications should ask their doctors before working in hot environments.
10. Watch out for other hazards. Use common sense and monitor other environmental hazards that often accompany hot weather, such as inversion layers creating excessive smog and levels of ozone.