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Working in extreme heat – a guide for workers

Working in extreme heat can cause serious illness and injury – especially if there is also high humidity or radiant heat.

Working in extreme heat can put your body under stress. Physically demanding work can make the effects of heat even more extreme. If your body has to work too hard to stay cool this can cause heat-related illness and injury, which can be fatal if ignored.

You are especially at risk if you work outdoors in summer or in indoor environments with high humidity or radiant heat – such as kitchens, laundries, foundries, or enclosed spaces.

The business must make sure, as far as is reasonably practicable, that you are not put at risk while working in extremely hot conditions.

Things the business can do to keep you safe

The business must engage with you when making decisions about how to reduce the risk of working in extreme heat. See examples below:

- if reasonably practicable, remove the source of heat
- replace heat-producing machinery with machinery that produces less heat
- move heat producing machinery to non-work areas
- reduce radiant heat by insulating heat-producing machinery and using heat screens
- cool the air using air-conditioning, install ventilation, and remove excess moisture with dehumidifiers
- provide mechanical aids to reduce worker effort
- provide protection from the sun if working outdoors

- schedule work for cooler times of the day or year
- allow extra breaks for you to cool down (away from the heat), or rotate tasks between workers where conditions are hot
- provide lots of cool drinking water
- provide specialised personal protective equipment
- monitor the work environment (such as temperature or humidity levels) to make sure that safe levels are not exceeded
- check you are fit and healthy enough for working in the heat before you start and while you are working
- provide you with training on how to keep yourself healthy and safe when working in extreme heat.

Things you can do to keep yourself safe

The business should make it easy for you to do the following:

- Drink plenty of cool fluids but avoid caffeine, energy drinks, and alcohol.
- Pace yourself, don't overdo it.
- Tell the business if you have any health conditions or are taking medication that might make you sensitive to extreme heat.
- Wear/use and look after your PPE as instructed by the business.
- Make sure you are protected from the sun. Wear a wide-brimmed hat, loose long-sleeved clothing, and plenty of sunscreen.

- Stop work if you think the work environment has become unsafe to continue working in, or you notice signs of heat-related illness or injury in yourself or a workmate. Tell your supervisor.
- Speak up. If you see any ways to improve health and safety, or see someone working in an unsafe way, tell your supervisor or health and safety representative.

You need to be fit and healthy to work in extreme heat

Even if the business has taken all reasonable actions to reduce risk, there may still be some remaining risk from extreme heat. The business may then get a qualified health and safety professional to ask you questions about your health, and run tests to make sure you are fit and healthy enough. They may also want to monitor your health during and after working in extreme heat to make sure that your health has not been affected.

You have the right to be consulted about health monitoring before it starts. You also have the right to ask any questions and to know how your information will be used and stored, and how long it will be kept.

Symptoms and first aid treatment options

The table below shows symptoms and treatment options for common heat-related illnesses. If you notice signs of heat-related illness or injury in yourself or a workmate, stop work and tell your supervisor.

CONDITION	SYMPTOMS	TREATMENT
Heat rash	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Small, red, itchy bumps on skin. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Move to a cooler, less humid environment. - Keep the affected skin dry.
Heat cramps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Muscular pains and spasms, usually in the abdomen, arms or legs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - See a doctor or nurse if you: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - have a heart condition, or - are on a low-sodium diet. - Drink water or electrolyte replacement solutions. - Rest in a cool environment and do not return to strenuous activity until a few hours after the cramps have ended. - See a doctor or nurse if cramps do not go away within one hour.
Heat exhaustion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Heavy sweating. - Paleness. - Muscle cramps. - Tiredness/weakness. - Dizziness. - Vomiting. - Headache. - Fast and weak pulse. - Shallow breathing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stop work immediately. - Move to a cool place, out of the sun and away from any other heat sources. - Drink water or electrolyte replacement solutions. - Take action to cool down (remove clothes, sponge with cold water, apply wet towels). - See a doctor or nurse if symptoms worsen or last longer than one hour.
Heat stroke	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - High body temperature (above 39.4°C). - Confusion. - Disorientation. - Unconsciousness. - Red hot dry skin (no sweating). - Throbbing headache. - Nausea. - Rapid, strong pulse. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Call 111 – for immediate medical assistance. Then: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - move to a cool place with circulating air - remove or loosen unnecessary clothing - cool down – for example, by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - splashing room temperature water on skin, or sponging skin - using a fan to direct a gentle airflow over your body - applying cold packs or wrapped ice to your neck, groin and armpits - Monitor body temperature and continue cooling efforts until body temperature drops below 38.5°C - If fully conscious, sit up and drink cool, but not cold, fluid, such as water or an electrolyte solution

More information

For more detailed information on managing the risks from working in extreme heat, see WorkSafe's good practice guidelines: [Working safely in extreme temperatures](#)