

# Hazards of Working In Warm Climates

Hot summer months pose special hazards for outdoor workers. They need to protect themselves against heat, sun exposure and other hazards. Employers and employees should know what to watch out for and how to manage them.

## The sun

Sunlight contains ultraviolet (UV) radiation, which causes premature aging of the skin, wrinkles, cataracts, and skin cancer. There are no safe UV rays or safe suntans. Be especially careful in the sun if you burn easily, spend a lot of time outdoors, or have any of the follow physical features:

1. Freckles
2. Fair skin
3. Blond, red, or light brown hair.

There are ways to block those harmful rays. Below is a list of ways that your employee can protect themselves from the sun:

- **Cover up. Wear loose-fitting, long-sleeved shirts and long pants.**
- **Use sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30. Be sure to follow application directions on the packaging.**
- **Wear a hat. A wide brim hat, not a baseball cap, works best because it protects the neck, ears, eyes, forehead, nose, and scalp.**
- **Wear UV-absorbent sunglasses.**
- **Limit exposure. UV rays are most intense between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.**

## Dealing with heat

The combination of heat and humidity can be a serious health threat during the summer. If you work outside, or in a kitchen, laundry, or bakery, you may be at an increased risk for heat-related illness. So, take precautions. Here's how:

- **Drink small amounts of water frequently**
- **Wear light-colored, loose-fitting, breathable clothing – cotton is good**

- **Take frequent short breaks in cool shade**
- **Eat smaller meals before working**
- **Avoid caffeine and alcohol or large amounts of sugar**
- **Work in the shade**
- **Find out from a medical provider if your medications and heat do not mix**
- **Know that equipment like respirators or work suits can increase heat stress**

There are three kinds of major heat-related disorders – heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke. You need to know how to recognize each one and what first aid treatment is necessary.

## Lyme Disease/Tick-Borne Diseases

There are a number of diseases that can be transmitted to people by bacteria from bites of infected deer (blacklegged) ticks. In the case of Lyme disease, most, but not all, victims will develop a “bull's-eye” rash. Other signs and symptoms may be non-specific and similar to flu-like symptoms such as:

- Fever
- Lymph node swelling
- Neck stiffness
- Generalized fatigue
- Headaches
- Migrating joint aches
- Muscle aches

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You are at an increased risk if you work outdoors involves construction, landscaping, forestry, brush clearing, land surveying, farming, railroads, oil fields, utility lines, or park and wildlife management. To protect yourself use these precautions:

- **Wear light-colored clothes to see ticks more easily**
- **Wear long sleeves; tuck pant legs into socks or boots**
- **Wear high boots or closed shoes**
- **Wear a hat**
- **Use tick repellants, but not on your face**
- **Examine your body and shower after work**
- **Wash work clothes at high temperature**

If you do find a tick, remove it quickly with fine-tipped tweezers. Do not use petroleum jelly, a hot match, or nail polish to remove the tick.

## West Nile Virus

West Nile virus is transmitted by the bite of an infected mosquito. Mild symptoms include fever, headache, and body aches, occasionally with a skin rash on the trunk of the body and swollen lymph glands. Symptoms of severe infection include headache, high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, and paralysis.

You can protect yourself from mosquito bites in these ways:

- **Apply Picaridin or insect repellent with DEET to exposed skin.**
- **Spray clothing with repellents containing DEET or permethrin. (Do not spray permethrin directly onto exposed skin).**
- **Wear long sleeves, long pants, and socks.**
- **Be extra vigilant at dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active.**
- **Get rid of sources of standing water (used tires, buckets, etc.) to reduce or eliminate mosquito breeding areas.**

## Poison Ivy-Related Plants

Poison ivy, poison oak and poison sumac have poisonous sap (urushiol) in their roots, stems, leaves, and fruits. The urushiol may end up on the skin by direct contact with the plants or by contact with contaminated objects, such as clothing, shoes, tools, and animals.

Approximately 85 percent of the general population will develop an allergy if exposed to poison ivy, oak, or sumac. Forestry workers and firefighters who battle forest fires have developed rashes or lung irritations from inhaling the smoke of burning plants.

- **Wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants, tucked into boots. Wear cloth or leather gloves.**
- **Apply barrier creams to exposed skin.**
- **Educate workers on signs and symptoms of contact with poisonous ivy, oak, and sumac.**
- **Keep rubbing alcohol accessible. It removes the oily resin up to 30 minutes after exposure.**

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