

Understanding Heat Illnesses

At times, workers will have to work in hot environments for extended periods. When the human body can no longer maintain a normal temperature, heat illnesses can occur and even lead to death. Heat environments can exist both indoors and outdoors.

What is Heat Illness?

The following are illnesses that may result from exposure to heat in the workplace:

Heat Stroke is the most serious heat-related health problem. It occurs when the body's temperature regulating system fails and body temperature rises to critical levels (greater than 104°F). ***This is a medical emergency that may result in death!*** The signs of heat stroke are:

- **Confusion**
- **Loss of consciousness**
- **Seizures**

Workers experiencing heat stroke have a very high body temperature and may stop sweating. If a worker shows signs of possible heat stroke, ***get medical help immediately***, and call 911. Until help arrives, move the worker to a shady, cool area and remove as much clothing as possible. Wet the worker with cool water and circulate the air to speed cooling. Place cold wet cloths, wet towels or ice all over the body, or soak the worker's clothing with cold water.

Heat Exhaustion is the next most serious heat-related health problem.

The signs and symptoms of heat exhaustion are:

- **Headache**
- **Nausea**
- **Dizziness**
- **Weakness**
- **Irritability**
- **Confusion**
- **Thirst**
- **Heavy sweating**
- **A body temperature higher than 100.4°F.**

Workers with heat exhaustion should be removed from the hot area and given liquids to drink. Cool the worker with cold compresses to the head, neck, and face or have the worker wash his or her head, face and neck with cold water.

Heat Cramps are muscle pains usually caused by the loss of body salts and fluids during sweating. Workers with heat cramps should drink water and/or sports drinks every 15-20 minutes.

Heat Rash is the most common problem in hot work environments. It is caused by sweating and looks like a red cluster of pimples or small blisters. The best treatment is a cooler, less humid work environment. You should also use powder to keep the rash area dry. ***DO NOT*** use ointments or creams on a heat rash.