

# Preventing Heat Illnesses When the Outdoors is Your Office

Each year, thousands of workers become sick from heat exposure when working outside due to extreme high temperatures and lack of rain. The body normally cools itself by sweating. During hot weather, especially with high humidity, sweating may not be enough. Body temperatures can rise to dangerous levels if precautions are not taken. Heat illnesses can range from heat rash and heat cramps to heat exhaustion and heat stroke. Heat stroke requires immediate medical attention and can result in death.

Workers exposed to hot and humid conditions are at a high risk for heat illness, especially those doing heavy work tasks or using bulky protective clothing and equipment. Some workers might be at a greater risk than others if they have not built up a tolerance to hot conditions. As an employer, you can put measures in place that will help prevent heat illness among your outside workers.

Q. What can be done to prevent heat illness?

A. Remember three simple words: water, rest, shade.

1. Suggest employees drink plenty of water often. Ensure that water or sports drinks are available at the work site. If you know in advance that employees will be working on a hot job, suggest they drink plenty of liquids a few days prior to reduce their chance of dehydration and heat illness.
2. Adjust work activities. Offer frequent rest breaks and limit time in the heat. Employers should include heat illness prevention steps in worksite training and plans.
3. Ensure there are shady areas for employees to get out of the sun. Employees should wear appropriate loose-fitting clothing and a hat that can breathe, plus use sun block.
4. Gradually build up to heavy work in hot conditions. This helps employees build tolerance to the heat. Employers should take steps that help workers become acclimated, especially workers who are new to working outdoors in the heat or have been away from work for a week or more. Gradually increase workloads and allow more frequent breaks during the first week of work.
5. Learn to recognize the symptoms of heat illness. It's important to know and look out for the symptoms of heat illness in yourself and others during hot weather. Plan for an emergency and know what to do — acting quickly can save lives! Take a first aid class from the Red Cross that discusses the specifics of heat illness and the best ways to handle those situations.

For more information about heat illness on the job, visit the OSHA website at <http://www.osha.gov>.