Heat Illness



Safety Talk

WHAT'S AT STAKE
A hot work environment or summer weather can bring heat illness – in three stages. *Heat cramps* in leg and stomach muscles are painful but not lifethreatening, heat exhaustion is more serious and *heat stroke* is a medical emergency.

WHAT'S THE DANGER
Heat cramps mean the body lost minerals through sweating. Heat exhaustion brings dizziness, sweating, headache, weakness and nausea. With heat stroke, symptoms are similar to heat exhaustion but skin is hot and dry and breathing is deep and fast. You may collapse. The body is no longer able to sweat, and temperature rises dangerously. If inner-body temperature isn't cooled rapidly, the brain, kidneys and heart can be fatally damaged.

EXAMPLE
A laborer at a waste processing facility was sorting heavy scrap on a hot day. He wore a hardhat with a towel inside – ineffective for cooling as well as unsafe – and wasn't drinking the needed water and electrolytes. In late afternoon he started to stagger. A co-worker told him to rest in shade. The heat stroke victim headed toward shade, but suddenly crouched down and collapsed. The co-worker tried to revive him but he didn't respond. He died in hospital.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

To ease **heat cramps**, drink a solution of *one teaspoon of salt per pint of water* or water with lightly-salted snacks, and try resting.

If you have **heat exhaustion** symptoms, don't wait for signs of further dehydration – blurred vision, pale wet skin and shallow rapid breathing. Move to a cooler place, loosen clothing and slowly drink fluids such as the salted water. Lay with feet and legs slightly elevated. Helpers can call medical help, and sponge with lukewarm water to cool your body.

When someone suffers **heat stroke**, co-workers should call for medical help immediately, and cool him quickly with water and fanning.

These tips can help prevent heat illness:

- Get accustomed to heat gradually. Avoid over-exertion.
- Drink plenty of water or a drink that replaces fluids and minerals.
- Don’t drink coffee, tea or cola to replace water because these contribute to dehydration.
- Take short rest breaks in a cooler area.
- Eat light, cool meals.
- Wear a hat outdoors, and light layered clothing. Cotton is generally cooler than synthetic fabrics. Some work environments require reflective or cooled suits.

FINAL WORD

Heat illness can be serious – even fatal. Take it easy and drink plenty of water in hot conditions.