

Members Information Bulletin

Working in Heat

What is heat stress?

Heat-related illness and heat stress occur when the body is unable to cool itself enough to maintain a healthy temperature. The body normally cools itself by sweating, but sometimes sweating isn't enough and the body temperature keeps rising.

There are seven main factors contributing to heat stress:

They are

1. temperature
2. humidity
3. movement of air
4. radiant temperature of surroundings
5. your clothing
6. activity you are doing
7. level of fluid loss and replacement

What are the health and safety effects of heat stress?

- Heat illness includes tiredness, irritability, inattention skin rashes, dehydration, heat cramps, heat exhaustion and heat stroke.
- There can be a rapid progression from heat exhaustion to heat stroke, which may have irreversible effects, and can be fatal. Heat stroke is the failure of the body to regulate its own temperature.
- Heat stress could also have an impact on the environment around you
- It can increase the risk of other injuries
- It can interact with other workplace hazards, such as exposure to hazardous substances
- It can aggravate existing medical conditions, such as pre-existing heart conditions?

What to do in the event of heat stress?

If a person reports discomfort or stress from the heat, they must be able to:

- immediately stop work, go to a cool area, rest, have a cool drink, or receive first aid treatment
 - not resume work until they are recovered
 - if no rapid improvement first aid or medical help must be sought
- if the person does not improve or deteriorates, call an ambulance. Signs of a serious life threatening condition are the person will have stopped sweating, skin will be hot and dry, and the body temperature will be hot.
Confusion and even loss of consciousness can occur.

What can be done to prevent heat stress from occurring? General

Drink more water, juices and non –alcoholic and non-caffeine based drinks. Drink before you feel thirsty

Drink at frequent intervals

Start work hydrated

Provision of hydration test kits to vulnerable employees

Rest often in the cool and or shade

Acclimatization, particularly relevant for fly in fly out workers

Help your sweat evaporate by increasing air circulation - fanning/breeze

Maintain a healthy lifestyle,

Be aware of your limitations – fitness, current health and medications etc.

Training

Is there training in the workplace for staff?

Is there training in the identification, assessment and control of the hazards of working in heat provided for occupational health and safety representatives and union delegates, and for managers and supervisors?

The indoor working environment

Are indoor workplace temperatures kept to between 18 and 26 degrees Celsius, where possible?

The outdoor working environment

Do arrangements to protect outdoor workers from heat and UV radiation include:

Provision of suitable clothing, hats, sunscreen etc?

Provision of cool water/amenities?

Promote systems/practices which assist workers to be hydrated before they commence work

Arrangements for working in heat

Work organization measures should be introduced when the work environment cannot be controlled sufficiently to reduce temperature and/or humidity.

Do these measures include?

- Avoidance of long periods of standing in hot conditions?
- Pre start hydration provisions
- Do workplaces have the basic amenities of drinking water, lunch/rest rooms, and first aid facilities?

Rest breaks for working in heat

Where the temperature at work exceeds 26 degrees Celsius, preventative measures should be taken before workers suffer heat stress.

Table 1 provides a basis for negotiation of recommended rest breaks for working in seasonal heat. Variations may be needed for specific industries, working conditions or circumstances, and climatic variations.

Table 1: Recommended rest breaks for working in seasonal heat

Duration of paid rest breaks within each hour when the temperature reaches and/or exceeds temperatures shown	Temp. (Degrees Celsius)
	temperate - northern
10 minutes	30 - 32° C
20 minutes	32 - 34° C
30 minutes	34 - 36° C
cease working	36 - 38° C

Rest break regimes should reflect local conditions and take specific risk factors into consideration. For example, the rest break regimes may be varied in northern climates, where there may be some acclimatization to working in heat.

Where escape from the elements may be difficult or impossible with outdoor work, rest breaks and stop work must be initiated at lower temperatures.

Any queries, Members can contact the Branch Office on 9227 9911 or Barry McVee on 0417 462 402 or Bryan Watkins 0417 913 770.

