

CAL/OSHA HEAT ADVISORY



When employees work in hot conditions, employers must take special precautions in order to prevent heat illness. Heat illness can progress to heat stroke and be fatal, especially when emergency treatment is delayed. An effective approach to heat illness is vital to protecting the lives of California workers.

Employers of outdoor workers must comply with the new permanent heat illness prevention standard. This standard requires employers to take four simple steps that include shade, water, training and written procedures. These can greatly reduce the risk of outdoor workers developing heat illness.

Heat illness results from a combination of factors including environmental temperature and humidity, direct radiant heat from the sun or other sources, air speed, and workload. Personal factors, such as age, weight, level of fitness, medical condition, use of medications and alcohol, and acclimatization affect how well the body deals with excess heat.

Heat Illness Risk Reduction

1. Recognize the Hazard.

There is no absolute cut-off below which work in heat is not a risk. With heavy work at high relative humidity or if workers are wearing protective clothing, even work at 70°F can present a risk. In the relative humidity levels often found in hot areas of California (20 to 40 percent) employers need to take some actions to effectively reduce heat illness risk when temperatures approach 80°F. At temperatures above 90°F, especially with heavy work, heat risk reduction needs to be a major concern. **It is especially important to be vigilant during periods of abnormally high heat.**

2. Water.

There must be an adequate supply of clean, cool, potable water. Employees who are working in the heat need to drink 4 eight-ounce glasses of water per hour, including at the start of the shift, in order to replace the water lost to sweat. For an eight-hour day this means employers must provide two or more gallons per person. Many people can be very dehydrated and not feel thirsty at all. Employees need ongoing encouragement to consume adequate water.

3. Shade and Rest Breaks.

Employers are required to provide shade for recovery periods when employees need relief from the heat. The direct heat of the sun can add as much as 15 degrees to the heat index. Heat illness occurs due to a combination of environmental and internal heat that cannot be adequately dissipated. Rest breaks are important to provide time for cooling and provide an opportunity to drink water. Breaks should be taken in cooler, shaded areas. Wide brimmed hats can also decrease the impact of direct heat.

4. Acclimatization.

People need time for their bodies to adjust to working in heat. This “acclimatization” is particularly important for employees (1) returning to work after a prolonged absence or recent illness, (2) recently moving from a cool to a hot climate, or (3) working during the beginning stages of a heat wave. For heavy work under extremely hot conditions, a period of 4 to 10 days of progressively increasing work time starting with about 2 hours work per day, though not required, is recommended. Also recommended, for less severe conditions at least the first 2 or 3 days of work in the heat should be limited to 2 to 4 hours. Monitor employees closely for signs and symptoms of heat illness, particularly when they have not been working in heat for the last few days or when a heat wave occurs.

5. Prompt Medical Attention.

Recognizing the symptoms of heat illness and providing an effective response requires promptly acting on early warning signs. Common early symptoms and signs of heat illness include headache, muscle cramps, and unusual fatigue. However, progression to more serious illness can be rapid and can include unusual behavior, nausea/vomiting, weakness, rapid pulse, excessive sweating or hot dry skin, seizures, and fainting or loss of consciousness. **Any of these symptoms require immediate attention.**

Even early symptoms may indicate serious heat exposure. If first aid trained personnel are not immediately available on-site to make an assessment and workers show any abnormal response to the heat, you should call 911 immediately. Regardless of the worker’s protests, no employee with any of the symptoms of possible serious heat illness noted above should be sent home or left unattended without medical assessment and authorization.

6. Training.

Supervisors and employees must be trained in the risks of heat illness and the proper measures to protect themselves and their co-workers. Training should include:

1. Why it is important to prevent heat illness
2. Procedures for acclimatization
3. The need to drink water frequently
4. The need to take breaks out of the heat
5. How to recognize the symptoms of heat illness
6. How to contact emergency services and how to effectively report the work location to 911
7. The importance of choosing water instead of soda or other caffeinated beverages and avoiding alcoholic beverages all together during high heat.

7. Written Procedures

Employers are required to put their heat illness prevention procedures, including employee training in writing. It is recommended this document be incorporated into the employers Injury and Illness Prevention Plan. Other recommended procedures include account for all your workers during and at the end of the work shift. Check the heat index prior to starting work each day. If the temperatures are high, consider beginning and ending your shifts early. If possible, work should be performed in the shade.



Drink water frequently.
Avoid soda, alcohol and coffee.