

# TOOL BOX TALK

## HEAT STRESS PREVENTION

Heat stress can occur when your body is unable to cool itself sufficiently and its temperature rises because heat is absorbed from the environment faster than the body can get rid of it.

### Examples of heat stress include:

**Heat rash or prickly heat** - This is an intense, itchy red skin rash following excessive sweating due to the sweat ducts becoming blocked. This can be treated by keeping your skin dry, wearing suitable clothing and avoiding hot and humid conditions.

**Heat cramps** – This can result from people who have sweated a lot during strenuous activity. The result can be painful muscle cramps usually affecting the abdomen, arms or legs. Cramps may also be an early symptom of the more severe condition of heat exhaustion so medical attention must be sought if they continue for more than an hour

### If you feel you do not need a doctor but feel you are beginning to overheat you should consider:

- Stopping all strenuous activity and resting quietly in a cool place for a while
- Increasing your fluid intake using cool water
- Laying down in the shade
- Removing some outer clothing (eg hard hat, boots, shirt) if it is safe to do so
- Fan yourself vigorously to increase evaporation

**Heat exhaustion** - This is a serious condition that can develop into heat stroke. It is the body's response to a loss of fluid and salt due to excessive sweating.

**Heat stroke** – This is a medical emergency, caused by a rise in core body temperature. A person suffering heat stroke becomes confused and may stagger or collapse. The skin may be either dry or wet.

### Warning signs of Heat stress

- Heavy sweating
- Headaches
- Tiredness and weakness
- Dizziness or fainting
- Slurred speech or blurred vision
- Nausea and vomiting
- Painful muscle spasms or cramps

### Causes of heat stress

#### Several factors may contribute to heat stress, including:

- The type of work you do
- High air temperature/humidity levels
- Radiant heat (eg Working outdoors, working near dryers, ovens or processes like smelting or molten metals)
- The Physical condition you are in

#### Individual factors that may increase your risk of heat stress include

- Pre-existing medical conditions (eg heart problems, diabetes or hypertension)
- Medications that may affect your body's temperature regulation
- Your age, weight and level of physical fitness

## Reducing heat related risks

- Have regular cooling off or rest periods
- Drink plenty of water (i.e. Stay hydrated – a poor diet and consuming alcohol or caffeine can cause dehydration)
- Wear appropriate clothing loose fitting clothes to allow air circulation
- Drink specialised re-hydrant liquids or air-cooled clothing when working in extreme conditions

## Employers duties to control heat stress where it is a real risk

- Have a plan in place for treating heat affected workers
- Screen Workers for heat tolerance
- Ensure workers follow their doctor's advice if they have pre-existing medical conditions, before working in hot conditions

## Hydration

Maintaining adequate hydration is one of the most important strategies to counteract the effects of heat stress.

During prolonged work in the heat our body can sweat up to one litre an hour. Unless this fluid is replaced by drinking, progressive dehydration will result.

You will not normally feel thirsty until you have lost 1-2 2% of your body weight in fluid. By this time, you will have an increased your risk of developing a heat-related illness. Food must be consumed at meal breaks to replace electrolytes and maintain energy.

### To stay hydrated you should:

- Start work in a well-hydrated state
- Drink to keep pace with sweat losses (drink regularly and between 600 ml and one litre of water per hour in summer)
- Avoid alcoholic/or soft caffeinated drinks
- Increase your intake of fluids if your urine is dark (the normal colour should be pale yellow)

## Reduce exposure

### Ways to control the temperature include

- Reducing radiant heat emissions from hot surfaces and plant equipment for example through insulation and shielding
- Using ventilation and air-conditioning
- Humidity reducing methods e.g. for example installing a dehumidifier
- Automating physically demanding tasks to reduce the work rate

## Shade

- Use trees, buildings or a temporary shelter (eg a tarp, umbrella) to provide shade
- Provide a cool and shady place for rest and meal breaks

## How to report a Health & Safety Issue or Concern

Do not think because you may be new on site that you should not report a hazard.

To report any health & safety concern or hazard please contact the Hays Health and Safety team by calling 1800 786 057 (Australia) or 0800 562 669 (option 4) (New Zealand). Alternatively, if you prefer you can also report this by speaking to your Hays consultant. Hays will always work to ensure that your safety comes first and so and will take the necessary steps required to safeguard this. All calls are confidential, your identity will not be divulged without your specific prior consent.

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