

Stay safe in the heat



Working in the heat can cause heat-related illness and impair normal work safety.

What is heat-related illness?

Heat-related illness is caused by the body overheating and being unable to cool itself down. It can result in hospitalisation, permanent injury and death, and can trigger existing illnesses.

Heat-related illness include:

- dehydration,
- heat cramps,
- heat exhaustion,
- heat stroke, and
- triggering existing medical conditions (e.g. heart conditions).

See the next page for **symptoms and what to do**.

How does heat impair safety?

Heat can make it harder to maintain normal safety due to things like hot surfaces, slippery hands, fogging safety glasses, discomfort from normal PPE, reduced concentration and increased fatigue, and feeling dizzy or faint.

Your rights while working in the heat

Your employer must take reasonable steps to prevent heat-related illness and maintain a safe environment.

Steps should include changing work schedules to avoid extreme heat, where possible, and monitoring the temperature of work areas.

If you are asked to work in the heat your employer should organise access to amenities to help you stay safe, hydrated and cool.

This could include things like:

- readily accessible cooled water,
- shelter from the sun while working,
- provision of sunscreen, hats, and gloves,
- additional breaks,
- provision of seating and shaded rest / cool-down areas,
- access to an air-conditioned area,
- cool packs or ice packs, and
- having a medical professional present to monitor welfare.

Remember: you have the right to stop work if you feel unwell or unsafe.

How to stay safe

- Drink plenty of water
- Keep cool
- Keep an eye on others
- Have a plan

Need help?

If someone is suffering from heat stroke call 000 immediately and ask for an ambulance

If you need medical advice, you can call healthdirect 1800 022 222 to speak to a registered nurse

If you need assistance in making your workplace safe you can:

- Notify your workplace health and safety rep
- call MEAA on 1300 65 65 13
- Call your state safety regulator:

NSW 13 10 50

VIC 1800 136 089

QLD 1300 63 21 28

SA 1300 365 255

WA 08 9327 8777

ACT 02 6207 3000

TAS 1300 366 322

NT 1800 019 115



Heat-Related Illness: Symptoms

Dehydration: Mild to moderate dehydration makes the heart work faster and leads to reduced fluid available for sweating.

Symptoms:

- Dizziness and tiredness
- Irritability
- Thirst
- Bright or dark yellow urine
- Loss of appetite
- Fainting

What to do – first aid

- Drink plenty of water or diluted fruit juice (1 part juice in 4 parts water) and avoid tea, coffee or alcohol
- Move somewhere cool, ideally air-conditioned
- If possible use a spray bottle with water to cool yourself down
- If you start to feel unwell, seek medical advice

Heat cramps: usually affects people who sweat a lot during strenuous activity (e.g. sport or gardening). The sweating causes the body to lose salt and water. The low salt levels in the muscles may be the cause of heat cramps and they can be a symptom of heat exhaustion.

Symptoms:

- Muscle pains
- Muscle spasms

What to do – first aid

- Stop all activity and lie in a cool space, legs slightly raised
- Drink water or diluted fruit juice (1 part juice in 4 parts water)
- Have a cool shower or bath
- Massage your limbs to ease spasms, apply cool packs
- Do not return to strenuous activity for a few hours after the cramps subside (exertion may lead to heat exhaustion/heat stroke)
- Seek medical advice if there is no improvement

Heat exhaustion: the body's response to an excessive loss of water and salt contained in sweat. If heat exhaustion is not treated, it can turn into heat stroke.

Symptoms:

- Heavy sweating (cool and moist skin)
- Pale skin
- Fast and weak pulse rate
- Shallow and fast breathing
- Muscle weakness or cramps
- Tiredness and dizziness
- Headache
- Nausea or vomiting
- Fainting

What to do – first aid

- Move to a cool place, ideally air-conditioned and lie down
- Remove excess clothing
- Take small sips of cool fluids
- Take a cool shower, bath or sponge bath
- Put cool packs under armpits, on the groin, or on the back of the neck to reduce body heat
- If symptoms worsen or if there is no improvement, seek urgent medical advice and call an ambulance if necessary

Heat stroke: is a life-threatening emergency and occurs when the body temperature rises above 40.5°C. Immediate first aid is very important, aim to lower body temperature as quickly as possible.

Symptoms:

- Sudden rise in body temperature
- Red, hot and dry skin (sweating has stopped)
- Dry swollen tongue
- Rapid pulse
- Rapid shallow breathing
- Intense thirst
- Headache
- Nausea or vomiting
- Dizziness or confusion
- Poor coordination or slurred speech
- Aggressive or bizarre behaviour
- Loss of consciousness, seizures or coma

What to do – first aid

- **Immediately call 000 and ask for an ambulance**
- Get the person into the shade, lay them down, and keep them as still as possible
- Give small sips of cool fluids if conscious and able to drink
- Bring their temperature down using any method available (sponging with cool water, cool shower, spraying with cool water from a garden hose or soaking clothes with cool water)
- Put cool packs under armpits, on the groin, or on the back of the neck to reduce body heat
- Do not give aspirin or paracetamol; they do not help and may be harmful
- If unconscious, lay the person on their side (recovery position) and check they can breathe properly
- Perform CPR if needed