

Heat Illness



Background

Unseasonal high temperatures are continuing to be felt in Queensland this week.

During this time and in anticipation of a potentially hot dry summer ahead of us, it is important that we protect ourselves to reduce the likelihood of experiencing heat illness.

Safety Issues Identified

The signs and symptoms of heat illness vary from physical rashes to personality or cognitive changes. Heat rash is a red irritation and inflammation of the skin brought on by excessive sweating and the rubbing of skin. Heat stress and heat stroke occur when the body loses its ability to control its core temperature causing it to overheat. Symptoms for both are similar and are highlighted in the table below;

Heat Stress Symptoms	Heat Stroke Symptoms
• Thirsty • Heavy Sweating • Tiredness / weakness • Headaches • Muscle cramps • Weakness • Vomiting or nausea	• Confusion • Very high temperature • Rapid Pulse • Dry Skin – not sweating • Collapse / Loss of consciousness • Death

Key Message

The most effective control measure to reduce the risk of heat illness is to eliminate your exposure to extreme temperatures. If it is not essential for you to undertake work outside in extreme temperatures, do not go outside. If your work does require you to go outside then you should try to plan your work for other cooler days, or schedule your work in the early mornings or late afternoons so as to avoid the hottest parts of the day. Other risk control measures when planning to undertake work outside include;

- Present fit for work (e.g. avoiding excessive alcohol intake the night before work);
- Drink at least 800ml of water 30 minutes before working outside in excessive heat;
- Drink water regularly throughout the day;
- Eat regularly throughout the day and try eating fruits as snacks;
- Wear appropriate PPE - including shirts with long sleeves and collars; long pants and a wide brimmed hat;
- Take regular breaks in the shade or an air-conditioned building or vehicle if available;
- Rotate work tasks and minimise intensive physical activity to short bursts;
- Apply SPF30+ sunscreen liberally and throughout the day; and
- Use a buddy system to regularly check on each other can help to identify early signs of heat illness.

Notes

IMPORTANT: If a person is suffering from heat stress or heat stroke it is important that they be moved to a shady area or if available, an air-conditioned building or vehicle. You should seek medical assistance, undo any buttons and loosen clothing on the person, and give them steady sips of water to rehydrate (check their airways first and do not allow the person to gulp water down). While waiting for assistance you should fan them, keep the person awake and talk to them. If possible immerse them in or splash them with water, or place ice packs or cool water bottles in areas where blood vessels flow close to the surface of the skin such as the armpits.