

# Wellness @Work

Summer 2012

## Heat Related Issues: Do You Know the Signs?

As the weather gets warmer, the chance of having a heat-related illness increases.

**Heat Stroke** is the most serious heat related illness.

Signs/Symptoms:

The body's temperature regulating system fails and body temp rises to over 104 degrees causing confusion, loss of consciousness and seizures; the worker may also stop sweating. This is a medical emergency that could result in death. Call 911 immediately! Try to keep the worker as cool as possible until help arrives.

**Heat Exhaustion** is the next most serious heat related illness.

Signs/Symptoms: headache, nausea, dizziness, irritability, confusion, thirst, heavy sweating, and a body temp over 100.4 degrees. Try to cool the worker with cool compresses to the head, neck and face; encourage them to take frequent sips of cool water.

Workers with heat exhaustion should seek medical evaluation and treatment.

**Heat Cramps** are caused by the loss of body salts and fluids during sweating.

Signs/Symptoms: muscle cramps. Workers should

replace fluid loss by drinking water and/or carbohydrate-electrolyte drinks every 15-20 minutes.



**Heat Rash** is the most common heat illness.

Signs/Symptoms: red cluster of pimples or small blisters usually appear on the

neck, upper chest, in the groin, under the breasts, and in the elbow creases. Keep the area dry and try to work in a cooler and less humid area. Do not apply creams or ointments—they can make the rash worse.

**More Information**

Visit [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov) or contact Mary Alice Ehrlich at [maehrlich@med1services.com](mailto:maehrlich@med1services.com) or Tammie Milligan at [tmilligan@med1services.com](mailto:tmilligan@med1services.com)

**Preparing for the Heat**

Humans are, to a large extent, capable of adjusting to the heat. This adjustment to heat, under normal circumstances, usually takes about 5 to 7 days, when the body will undergo a series of changes to make continued exposure to heat more endurable.

- ✓ Know the signs and symptoms of heat-related illnesses so you can monitor yourself and your co-workers.
- ✓ Drink lots of water—about 1 cup every 15 minutes.
- ✓ Wear lightweight, light colored, loose-fitting clothes.
- ✓ Avoid alcohol, caffeinated drinks, or heavy meals.

**Heat Stress Response**

- ✓ Call 911 (or local emergency) at once.
- ✓ Move the worker to a cool, shaded area.
- ✓ Loosen or remove heavy clothing.
- ✓ Provide cool drinking water.
- ✓ Fan and mist the person with water.

**MED-1 Services**

**Screenings**

- Biometric
- Cholesterol
- Diabetes
- Colo-rectal cancer
- PSA

**Specialized Programs**

- Health risk appraisals
- Immunizations
- Smoking cessation
- Customized worksite programs
- Drug free worksite
- Special exams

**Education**

- CPR/First Aid training
- AED programs
- Wellness coaching
- Health fairs
- Wellness education

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## Occupational Heat Exposure

From iron workers to construction to pastry bakers, West Michigan works in a wide variety of hot and humid environments. In the warm weather, many more workers will face hot conditions.

Heat related disorders can include:

- ✓ Heat stroke
- ✓ Heat exhaustion
- ✓ Heat cramps
- ✓ Fainting
- ✓ Heat rash

### Why is heat a hazard to workers?

When a person works in a hot environment, the body needs to maintain a steady temperature. The body does this by sweating. If the body cannot get rid of the excess heat, it will store it. When this happens, the person may become confused, irritable, and possibly lose the desire to drink. The next stage is often fainting, and sometimes death, if the person is not cooled down.

### Who could be affected by heat?

Workers who are exposed to hot indoor work environments, or outdoor conditions that are hot and humid are likely to be effected. There are both environmental and job specific factors that increase the risk.

#### Environmental:

- ✓ High temperature and humidity
- ✓ Radiant heat sources
- ✓ Contact with hot objects
- ✓ Direct sun exposure (with no shade)
- ✓ Limited air movement (no breeze or ventilation)

#### Job –specific:

- ✓ Physical exertion
- ✓ Use of bulky or non-breathable protective clothing

### How can heat-related illness be prevented?

Heat exposure and illness can be reduced by using air conditioning and ventilation, using work practices such as work/rest cycles, drinking water often, allowing workers to build up a tolerance to working in the heat.

Most importantly, know the symptoms of heat-related illnesses and how to treat them. Plan for an emergency and know what to do – acting quickly can save lives!

### More Information...

You can rely on MED-1 to provide more information on “beating the heat” in your work environment because we see your employees every day and know how important health and safety is to you.

Contact Mary Alice Ehrlich at [maehrlich@med1services.com](mailto:maehrlich@med1services.com) or Tammie Milligan at [tmilligan@med1services.com](mailto:tmilligan@med1services.com).



*Wellness at Work* is a informational publication provided by MED-1 Occupational Health System to facilitate health and wellness initiatives for employees.

For more information on any topics presented or to access additional copies of current or past issues, contact Tammie Milligan at 616.459.1570 or go to — [www.med1services.com](http://www.med1services.com).

### Preventing Heat Stress

Following a few basic precautions to lessen, or even eliminate, heat stress.

**Engineering controls**, such as general ventilation and spot cooling help defuse excess heat. Shielding protects employees from radiant heat sources. Evaporative cooling and mechanical refrigeration are other ways to reduce heat. Eliminating steam leaks, using power tools, and protective clothing also reduce the hazards of heat exposure for workers.

**Work practices** include providing plenty of water—as much as a quart per worker per hour. Also, train first aid workers to recognize and treat heat stress quickly.

Alternating **work and rest periods** in a cooler area avoids overheated workers. If possible, heavy work should be scheduled during mornings and evenings.

**Acclimatization** to the heat through short exposures followed by longer periods of work in the hot environment can reduce heat stress. New employees and those returning from an extended absence should have a recommended 5-day period of adjustment starting at 50/50 work and rest.

**Employee education** is vital to make workers aware of the need to replace fluids and salt lost through sweat. And, recognizing the early signs of dehydration, exhaustion, and other heat stresses can prevent heat stress.