

## Heat Illness

### WHAT'S AT STAKE

A hot work environment or summer weather can bring heat illness — in three stages. *Heat cramps* in leg and stomach muscles are painful but not life-threatening, *heat exhaustion* is more serious and *heat stroke* is a medical emergency.

### WHAT'S THE DANGER

Heat cramps mean the body lost minerals through sweating. Heat exhaustion brings dizziness, sweating, headache, weakness and nausea.

With heat stroke, symptoms are similar to heat exhaustion but skin is hot and dry and breathing is deep and fast. You may collapse. The body is no longer able to sweat, and temperature rises dangerously. If inner-body temperature isn't cooled rapidly, the brain, kidneys and heart can be fatally damaged.

### EXAMPLE

A laborer at a waste processing facility was sorting heavy scrap on a hot day. He wore a hardhat with a towel inside — ineffective for cooling as well as unsafe — and wasn't drinking the needed water and electrolytes. In late afternoon he started to stagger. A co-worker told him to rest in shade. The heat stroke victim headed toward shade, but suddenly crouched down and collapsed. The co-worker tried to revive him but he didn't respond. He died in hospital.

### HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

To ease **heat cramps**, drink a solution of *one teaspoon of salt per pint of water* or water with lightly-salted snacks, and try resting.

If you have **heat exhaustion** symptoms, don't wait for signs of further dehydration — blurred vision, pale wet skin and shallow rapid breathing. Move to a cooler place, loosen clothing and slowly drink fluids such as the salted water. Lay with feet and legs slightly elevated. Helpers can call medical help, and sponge with lukewarm water to cool your body.

When someone suffers **heat stroke**, co-workers should call for medical help immediately, and cool him quickly with water and fanning.

### These tips can help prevent heat illness:

- Get accustomed to heat gradually. Avoid over-exertion.
- Drink plenty of water or a drink that replaces fluids and minerals.
- Don't drink coffee, tea or cola to replace water because these contribute to dehydration.
- Take short rest breaks in a cooler area.
- Eat light, cool meals.
- Wear a hat outdoors, and light layered clothing. Cotton is generally cooler than synthetic fabrics. Some work environments require reflective or cooled suits.

### FINAL WORD

*Heat illness can be serious — even fatal. Take it easy and drink plenty of water in hot conditions.*

## TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

1. Heat illness occurs in three stages.  
 True  False
2. Heat cramps mean the body has lost some mineral content.  
 True  False
3. It is important to drink water frequently when working in hot conditions.  
 True  False
4. What replaces drinking water:  
a. Coffee  
b. Tea  
c. Cola drinks  
d. None of the above
5. Synthetic fabrics are cooler than cotton.  
 True  False

### What Would You Do?

Jim has hypertension (high blood pressure) and his doctor said to restrict his salt intake. At work, Jim faces a summer of hot sweaty labor. What should he do to maintain a balance of minerals and safely replace salt lost through sweating?

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T1706-01

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# Safety Talks!

FOR THE LEADER

Seasonal Safety ■ T1706-01

## BEFORE THE TALK 7 PREPARATION TIPS

- 1** While loose-fitting clothing is a hazard around moving equipment, it is recommended in hot weather. Prepare to talk to your workers about how to dress safely in hot environments.
- 2** Lead a discussion on cases of heat illness that employees have witnessed or experienced.
- 3** Invite a first aid attendant or company nurse to talk about the three stages of heat illness.
- 4** Prepare to discuss first aid for heat illness victims.
- 5** Here's a tip to pass on to your workers who like to carry a thermos of coffee: when working in the heat it's better to drink cool water than a hot beverage.
- 6** Use this safety meeting as an opportunity to push recreational hot weather safety guidelines that your workers should heed off the job.
- 7** Invite a knowledgeable sales representative from a hardhat distributor to discuss the need to wear personal protective headgear even in the heat and what features provide more comfort in the heat than others.

■ For information on a variety of safety topics, check out Bongarde's online network for safety professionals at <http://www.SafetyXChange.org>

■ If you want the latest in job safety news, tips, photos, health-related articles, fatality reports and audio talks, sign up for Safety Smart! Weekly Briefing at <http://www.SafetySmart.com>.

## AFTER THE TALK CHECKLIST

- Provided extra training to workers who did poorly on quiz  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Observed workers  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Refresher training  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other (describe)  
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Date: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

LOCATION: \_\_\_\_\_

MEETING CONDUCTED BY: \_\_\_\_\_

**MEETING WAS ATTENDED BY:** Each participant is to sign below, for record kept on file.

_____	_____	_____
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Answers to T1706-01 Quiz:

1. True 2. True 3. True 4. d 5. False