

CBS Corporate Safety and Environmental Affairs

CBS Corporation, 20 Stanwix Street,
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

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The Heat Is On

It's well into summer and things are heating up both at home and at work. Heat illness is an important safety matter. Every year, thousands of workers become sick from occupational heat exposure. Although heat stress is normally associated with higher temperatures outside, hazardously warm conditions can occur indoors as well. Heat illness occurs when your body can't adequately cool itself through sweating. According to the National Safety Council (NSC), heat-related illnesses can escalate rapidly, leading to delirium, organ damage, and even death.

Be aware of the common types of heat-related illness and what to do if you or someone you are with exhibits signs of them.

- **Heat rash** consists of red, irritated bumps and is a sign that hot conditions are affecting your body.
- **Heat syncope** (fainting) can occur when a person is not used to working in a hot environment.
- **Heat cramps** are muscle spasms that usually affect the legs or abdominal muscles, often after physical activity. Excessive sweating reduces salt levels in the body, which can result in heat cramps. If you think you may be experiencing heat cramps, sit or lie down in the shade, drink cool water or a sports drink and stretch affected muscles. Workers with pain or spasms in the abdomen, arms or legs should refrain from work for a few hours. Seek medical attention if you have heart problems or if the cramps don't get better in an hour.
- **Heat exhaustion** occurs if you have lost too much fluid, salt, or both through sweating. Uncontrolled heat exhaustion can evolve into heatstroke, so make sure to treat the victim quickly by moving them to a shaded or air-conditioned area, giving them water or other cool, nonalcoholic beverages and applying wet towels or having them take a cool shower.
- **Heatstroke** occurs when the body's natural cooling processes stop working, and the ill person stops sweating. Symptoms of heatstroke include very hot and dry skin, confusion, convulsions, seizures, and loss of consciousness. Heatstroke is very serious and can lead to death. If you suspect someone is experiencing heatstroke, call for emergency medical help immediately. While waiting, move the person into a half-sitting position in the shade; if humidity is below 75%, spray the victim with water and fan them vigorously; if humidity is above 75%, apply ice to neck, armpits or groin; do not give aspirin or acetaminophen; do not give the victim anything to drink.

AVOIDING HEAT-RELATED INJURY

The best way to avoid a heat-related illness is to manage exposure outdoors during hot days. Air conditioning is the best way to cool off, according to the CDC. Also:

- Drink more liquid than you think you need and avoid alcohol. One liter per hour is recommended.
- Wear loose, lightweight clothing and a hat
- Replace salt lost from sweating by drinking fruit juice or sports drinks
- Limit -spending time outdoors during the hottest part of the day, from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- Wear sunscreen; sunburn affects the body's ability to cool itself
- Pace yourself when you run or otherwise exert your body