

TOOLBOX TALKS

A Quality Service Contractors Publication for Members

August 2016

5 Ways to recognize a Heat Illness

What is a heat-related illness?

During a heat wave, it's important to know and be able to recognize the signs and symptoms of a heat-related illness. There are different types of heat-related illnesses, ranging from those that cause temporary discomfort to the generally fatal condition known as heat stroke. In all heat-related illnesses, the symptoms appear when a person is exposed to extreme temperatures.

What are the symptoms and signs of a heat-related illness?

The following list can help you recognize the symptoms of heat-related illnesses:

1. Heat Rash: Heat rash is a skin irritation caused by excessive sweating during hot, humid weather. It can occur at any age but is most common in young children. Heat rash looks like a red cluster of pimples or small blisters.
2. Heat cramps: A person who has been exercising or participating in other types of strenuous activity in the heat may develop painful muscle spasms in the arms, legs, or abdomen referred to as heat cramps. The body temperature is usually normal, and the skin will feel moist and cool, but sweaty.
3. Heat syncope: Someone who experiences heat syncope (fainting) will experience the sudden onset of dizziness or fainting after exposure to high temperatures, particularly after exercising in the heat. As with heat cramps, the skin is pale and sweaty but remains cool. The pulse may be weakened, and the heart rate is usually rapid. Body temperature is normal.
4. Heat exhaustion: Heat exhaustion is a warning that the body is getting too hot. Those most prone to heat exhaustion include elderly people, people with high blood pressure, and people working or exercising in a hot environment. A person with heat exhaustion may be thirsty, giddy, weak, uncoordinated, nauseous, and sweating profusely. As with heat syncope and heat cramps, the body temperature is usually normal in heat exhaustion. The heart rate (pulse rate) is normal or elevated. The skin is usually cold and clammy.
5. Heat stroke: Heat stroke is a serious, life-threatening condition that occurs when the body loses its ability to control its temperature. Victims of heat stroke almost always die, so immediate medical attention is essential when problems first begin. In heat stroke, a person develops a fever that rapidly rises to dangerous levels within minutes.

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A person with heat stroke usually has a body temperature above 104 F (40 C), but the temperature may rise even higher. Other symptoms and signs of heat stroke may include confusion, combativeness, and bizarre behavior, feeling faint, staggering, strong rapid pulse, dry flushed skin, and lack of sweating. Delirium or coma can also result from heat stroke.



The best defense is prevention. Below are some prevention tips:

- Drink more fluids (nonalcoholic), regardless of your activity level. Don't wait until you're thirsty to drink.
Warning: If your doctor generally limits the amount of fluid you drink or has you on water pills, ask your doctor how much you should drink while the weather is hot.
- Don't drink liquids that contain alcohol or large amounts of sugar—these actually cause you to lose more body fluid. Also, avoid very cold drinks, because they can cause stomach cramps.
- Stay indoors and, if at all possible, stay in an air-conditioned place. If your home does not have air conditioning, go to the shopping mall or public library—even a few hours spent in air conditioning can help your body stay cooler when you go back into the heat. Call your local health department to see if there are any heat-relief shelters in your area.
- Electric fans may provide comfort, but when the temperature is in the high 90s, fans will not prevent heat-related illness. Taking a cool shower or bath, or moving to an air-conditioned place is a much better way to cool off.
- Wear lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing.
- NEVER leave anyone in a closed, parked vehicle.
- Although any one at any time can suffer from heat-related illness, some people are at greater risk than others. Check regularly on:
 - Infants and young children
 - People aged 65 or older
 - People who have a mental illness
 - Those who are physically ill, especially with heart disease or high blood pressure



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- Visit adults at risk at least twice a day and closely watch them for signs of heat exhaustion or heat stroke. Infants and young children, of course, need much more frequent watching.

If you must be out in the heat:

- Limit your outdoor activity to morning and evening hours.
- Cut down on exercise. If you must exercise, drink two to four glasses of cool, nonalcoholic fluids each hour. A sports beverage can replace the salt and minerals you lose in sweat. Warning: If you are on a low-salt diet, talk with your doctor before drinking a sports beverage. Remember the warning in the first “tip” (above), too.
- Try to rest often in shady areas.
- Protect yourself from the sun by wearing a wide-brimmed hat (also keeps you cooler) and sunglasses and by putting on sunscreen of SPF 15 or higher (the most effective products say “broad spectrum” or “UVA/UVB protection” on their labels).

While heat cramps, heat syncope, and heat exhaustion may all be present in mild degrees, you should always contact a doctor or seek emergency medical attention if the symptoms of these conditions are severe or worsen with time. *Heat stroke is a true medical emergency. If a person has the symptoms of heat stroke, you should notify emergency services (911) immediately.*



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