

SAFETY MEMO

June 21, 2021 – Heatstroke

Did you know?

Introduction

Due to climate change, longer and more recurring heat wave episodes are felt across the world and can quickly become unbearable in cities where temperatures are normally higher than in the countryside. In the workplace, factory and kitchen workers are considered more at risk of being exposed to extreme heat, and therefore heatstroke.

Several factors can cause heatstroke: high room temperature and humidity, working in direct sunlight, wearing dark and inadequate clothing, demanding tasks done without periods of rest, lack of adequate hydration and lack of acclimatization to heat¹.

Heatstroke

Heatstroke is a heat illness caused by prolonged exposure to high temperatures or prolonged physical exertion. It is caused by the body overheating.

The American College of Emergency Physicians states that each year there are thousands of emergency room visits caused by heat illnesses, and approximately 400 deaths². Anyone can be affected by heat illnesses.

In the United States, 50-70% of outdoor fatalities occur in the first few days of work in hot environments³. In situations where workers are required to work in high temperatures, it is important to calculate and plan for an acclimatization period. Lack of acclimatization is a major risk factor for the health of the worker.

Recognize the Symptoms and Take Action

Heatstroke is distinguished from heat exhaustion by its more severe symptoms. During heatstroke, it is important to provide immediate assistance (call emergency services) since it can put the person's life in danger.

The Commission for Standards, Equity, Health and Safety at Work (CNESST) divides the symptoms of heatstroke into two levels.

¹ CNESST : <https://www.cnesst.gouv.qc.ca/fr/prevention-securite/identifieur-corriger-risques/liste-informations-prevention/coup-chaleur>

² <https://www.beaumont.org/health-wellness/blogs/know-the-difference-between-heat-stroke-heat-exhaustion>

³ OSHA: <https://www.osha.gov/heat-exposure>



Figure 1: The two emergency levels of heatstroke.

The first level requires the worker to hydrate and take a break in a cool place quickly. Symptoms to watch out for in this case are as follows:

- Pale, warm and clammy skin.
- Excessive sweating.
- Rapid breathing.
- Dizziness, vertigo.
- Unusual fatigue.

The second level carries a more serious risk and requires immediate assistance from the emergency services. Symptoms to watch out for at this level are as follows:

- Absence of perspiration.
- Hot and dry skin.
- Inconsistent remarks.
- Loss of balance, unsteady gait.
- Drowsiness.
- Nausea and vomiting.
- Loss of consciousness, convulsions.

It is essential to make workers and those around us aware of the dangers and symptoms of heatstroke. When heatstroke is suspected, immediate attention should be given to the affected person to ensure their condition stabilizes.

