Prepare **now** to prevent heat-related illness at work

Heat-related illnesses happen when a person heats up faster than they can cool down. Heat-related illness can affect everyone – even those accustomed to working in the heat. If heat stress progresses to heat stroke, it is a medical emergency that, untreated, can lead to death.

Early signs include nausea, light-headedness, fatigue, muscle cramping, and dizziness. Symptoms range from mild to severe and can quickly escalate into a medical emergency if untreated–but heat-related illness can be prevented in most cases.

Educate and communicate

- [ ] Listen to local weather forecasts and be aware of changes in the weather. Keep workers informed as well.
- [ ] Make workers aware of the signs, symptoms, and prevention of heat stress and heatstroke. Remind them where to get first aid, if needed.
- [ ] Prepare your first aid attendants for heat-related illnesses. Have them review first aid protocols to treat heat-related illnesses and check their inventory of supplies.
- [ ] Provide training in first aid, emergency response, and monitoring.
- [ ] Discuss heat safety precautions with your worker health and safety representative or joint health and safety committee. They can also recommend measures to protect workers and support effective communication with all areas.

Ventilate

- [ ] Provide access to shade and places to cool down – including air-conditioned spaces and cool showers.
- [ ] Provide access to fans for spot cooling, where appropriate, keeping in mind:
  - At temperatures above 30°C, fans alone may not be able to prevent heat-related illness.
  - Fans can cause dehydration at temperatures above 35°C, particularly in dry conditions, increasing risks of heat stress.

Hydrate

- [ ] Provide access to cool drinking water, or permit workers to have a water bottle at their workstation.
- [ ] Encourage workers to drink water every 15 minutes and to drink BEFORE they become thirsty.

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Plan

- [ ] Avoid scheduling workers outdoors as much as possible to avoid work in direct sunlight. Assign them to be indoors, in shaded areas, or air-conditioned areas.
- [ ] Modify work schedules to include frequent rest periods with water breaks
- [ ] Consider adjusting hours so that more physically intensive tasks can be done at cooler times of the day —before 10 a.m. or after 4 p.m. when possible.
- [ ] Avoid tiring or physically exhausting work outdoors without frequent breaks.

Dress

- [ ] Encourage workers to wear lightweight, light-coloured, loose-fitting, clothing made with natural fibre or breathable fabrics, such as cotton, and linen.
- [ ] Consider offering protective clothing that provides cooling, such as air-cooled suits, or ice-cooled vests, where practical.

Sun protection

- [ ] Provide access to broad-spectrum sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher and SPF 30 lip balm.

Vehicles

- [ ] Use sunshades for the windshield and windows to keep the sun and heat out of the vehicle.
- [ ] Remind workers how to cool down their vehicle after it has been sitting in the sun.

Monitor

- [ ] Increase check-ins with workers in hot conditions to monitor heat-related illness signs and make sure they are keeping cool and drinking plenty of water.
- [ ] For employees working outdoors, implement a buddy system and encourage workers to watch each other for symptoms of heat stress or heat stroke.
- [ ] Remember that workers who may be at greater risk (those with medical conditions or physical impairments) may need help to stay cool.

Know your risks

- [ ] Workers with pre-existing conditions such as COPD, asthma, or heart conditions are at greater risk for heat-related illness. Talk to your workers about health issues that may put them at more risk when working in the sun.

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