

As summer approaches it brings along the warm temperatures. Typically, in Western Washington we stay relatively cool, being near the Sound and ocean keeps temperature moderate. In Eastern Washington, the temperature can get pretty warm and stay that way for several weeks. In Washington State the Outdoor Heat Exposure rule takes effect starting May 1st and ending September 30th. Therefore, there is the need to make sure all workers understand the seriousness of being exposed to warm outdoor temperatures.

Heat Related Illness (RHI) occurs when the body's means of controlling its internal temperature starts to fail. The body cools itself by blood flow to the skin's surface and by sweating. The sweat evaporates from the body which results in a cooling effect. Keep in mind that excessive sweating can lead to dehydration, therefore drink plenty of water (a cup every 15-20 minutes). Don't wait until you are thirsty!

Factors such as air temperature, work rate, humidity, clothing worn while working, age, weight, personal fitness, medical conditions (diabetes, heart condition, etc.), medications (water pills, blood pressure, heart condition, allergies, etc. - check with your doctor), caffeine, and alcohol may lead to heat illness. Clothing, PPE's, and humidity can restrict sweat evaporation and not allow the body to cool. The body continues to produce heat but can't release the heat, so the deep body temperature rises. Eventually the body's control mechanism starts to fail. When this occurs symptoms of heat illness start to appear.

There are 4 different types of heat-related illnesses:

- Heat Rash
- Heat Cramps
- Heat Exhaustion
- Heat Stroke

Typical symptoms of heat illnesses are:

- Red bumps
- Fainting
- Irritability
- Muscle spasms in legs or abdomen
- Weakness
- Red or flushed hot dry skin
- Headaches
- Lightheadedness
- Nausea
- Clumsiness
- Heavy sweating
- Vomiting
- Dizziness
- Clammy, moist skin
- Paleness
- Bizarre behavior
- Mental confusion or losing consciousness
- Panting or Panting and/or rapid breathing
- Exhaustion

Watch out for yourself and coworkers. If you, or a coworker, experience symptoms, notify your supervisor and/or call 911 immediately and cool the person. Cool the person by moving to a shaded area, fanning, spraying with cool water, remove restrictive clothing, provide cool drinking water, etc. It is important to get treatment before harmful damage is done to the body.

To prevent heat illness keep hydrated throughout the day, eat properly, build up a tolerance to heat, wear breathable clothing (if possible), remove PPE while taking breaks in cool shaded areas, avoid caffeine and alcohol, work during cooler parts of the day, and watch out for yourself and coworkers.

Safety standards require employees be trained on [Heat Related Illness](#) and the employer's safety program to identify, evaluate, and control hazards. Ask your supervisor for a copy of the HRI rule.