

Let Workers Acclimate to Heat

Cal/OSHA studies of heat-related illnesses and deaths indicate that allowing workers to acclimate to the heat is one of the best defenses against heat-related illnesses and fatalities. The risk of dying from heat illness appears to be especially critical during the first exposure to the high temperatures and for new workers who just begin working in extreme heat, as the body needs to adapt gradually to exertions in the heat and humidity. It's imperative to monitor workers at all times during hot weather and allow those who are new to working in hot weather to gradually adapt to the daily routine.

Letting workers adjust to changes in weather by gradually increasing their heat exposure and physical activity likely reduces the risk of heat-related issues. According to Cal/OSHA heat illness prevention data, most people adjust to the weather or acclimate within four-to-14 days of regular work levels.

Raising awareness is also an important key in preventing heat illness. California Heat Illness Prevention Standards require mandatory training for employees and supervisors. Information on acclimatization, encouraging employees to continuously drink water throughout the day, and taking frequent cool-down breaks or preventative recovery periods in the shade, among other actions, are included in the mandatory training.

In addition to the requirements outlined in the heat illness prevention regulations (section 3395 of Title 8), employers may consider starting the work day early and pacing work activities for their workers. Other prevention techniques include increasing the number of water and rest breaks or preventative recovery periods on hot days and encouraging the use of a "buddy system" to monitor employees in the field.

Employees who work indoors should take the same precautions as those who work outdoors in extreme heat, and follow similar measures under (section 3203 of Title 8) their employers' Injury and Illness Prevention Program.

Employers with workers near sources of heat or inside buildings with limited cooling capabilities must ensure that work areas with risk of heat illness have been identified and evaluated, and that corrective measures and training have been implemented to protect workers. Cal/OSHA studies show effective reduction of heat illness depends on written procedures, access to water, access to cooler areas, acclimatization and weather monitoring, emergency response and employee and supervisor training.

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