

HEAT ALERT

Working safely in hot weather

Our bodies work hard to maintain a fairly constant internal temperature by evaporating sweat and varying the blood flow to the skin. Sometimes, the body is unable to adequately manage heat which can result in heat stress and heat related illness.

Heat stress occurs when the body takes on more heat from the environment than it is able to get rid of. Several factors may contribute to heat stress including;

- inadequate cooling off or rest periods
- insufficient water intake
- climatic conditions (such as low air movement, high humidity levels and high air temperature)
- inappropriate clothing
- individual factors that may cause dehydration (such as poor diet, vomiting, diarrhoea or alcohol and caffeine consumption)
- medical conditions (such as heart problems, diabetes or hypertension)
- medication that may affect the body's temperature regulation
- an individual's age, general physical fitness and weight.

Some heat related illnesses are particularly serious and require urgent medical attention. Generally, if a person is experiencing symptoms such as dizziness, disorientation, clumsiness, nausea, weakness and/or collapse, immediate medical attention should be sought.

Types of heat related illnesses;

- **Prickly heat** is an intense, itchy red rash on the skin. It is caused by a blockage of the sweat ducts from prolonged wetting of the skin.
 - o Treat by keeping the skin cool and dry, wearing suitable clothing and avoiding hot work.
- **Heat cramps** are painful muscle cramps that can occur on their own or with other heat related illness such as heat exhaustion.
 - o Lay the person in the shade, remove outer clothing, provide cool water and fan vigorously to increase evaporation.
- **Heat exhaustion** is a serious condition that can develop into heat stroke. A person with heat exhaustion may complain of weakness, nausea and/or "giddiness". The person may look pale and be breathless. The skin is usually wet from sweating.
 - o Lay the person in the shade, remove outer clothing, provide cool water and fan vigorously to increase evaporation.
- **Heat fainting** occurs when blood vessels (particularly in the legs) dilate in order to increase heat transfer to the skin and cause reduced return blood flow to the heart. This response temporarily reduces blood flow to the brain, which can cause a person to faint.
 - o Lay the person in the shade, remove outer clothing, provide cool water and fan vigorously to increase evaporation.
- **Heat stroke** is a medical emergency, caused by a rise in core body temperature. A person suffering heat stroke becomes confused, and may stagger or collapse. The skin may be either dry or wet.
 - o Call an ambulance and apply urgent first aid. Remove outer clothing, wet the skin and fan vigorously to increase evaporation.

How can you look after yourself?

There are measures we can take to minimise the risk of developing a heat related illness. CSD staff are encouraged to;

- plan work activities to limit outdoor tasks on very hot days
- when outdoors, use sun protection - hat, sunscreen and light sun-protective clothing
- maintain intake of water during the day
- take breaks during the day in cool shaded areas to enable the body to return to normal core temperature
- eat small regular meals and snacks during the day to ensure energy and salt levels are maintained
- avoid or limit caffeine intake which can increase urine output and therefore fluid loss.