

Working in hot conditions



Make sure you know the risks to safety at work so you and your colleagues remain safe

Working in high temperatures comes with risks to health and safety

Working in heat can be hazardous. Your body needs to maintain a consistent temperature but if it has to work too hard to keep cool or starts to overheat, you can suffer from a heat-related illness.

Some common effects of working in heat include:



Heat rash: leads to skin irritation and discomfort.



Heat cramps: resulting from heavy sweating without replacing salt and electrolytes.



Fainting: particularly when standing or rising from a sitting position.



Dehydration: can occur with increased sweating if not enough water is consumed.



Heat stroke: occurs when the body can no longer cool itself. This can be fatal.



Slips and falls: sweating more in hot conditions can increase the risk of slips.



Reduced concentration: leads to confusion and mistakes become more likely.



Increased chemical uptake: may occur as heat causes the body to absorb chemicals differently and can increase the side effects of some medications.

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Authorised by B.Holmes, General Secretary, NSWNMA | October 2021 | 11



What can be done to manage the risks of working in heat?

Your employer has an obligation to ensure your safety at work, this includes doing everything reasonably practicable to make sure that you are not exposed to harm from working in heat.

Your employer must consult you and your health and safety representatives (if any) when deciding how to manage the risks of working in heat.

Your employer should take the following steps:

1. IDENTIFY THE HAZARD

2. ASSESS THE RISK

- **Where the work is being done:** Radiant temperatures may be high when working in the sun; working in high levels of humidity make it more difficult to cool down.
- **The type of work:** Your concentration and coordination may be affected by heat, particularly for complex or difficult tasks.
- **Clothing/uniforms:** Includes PPE, as it may impair the evaporation of sweat and increase the risk of heat-related illness.
- **Staff considerations:** Have staff disclosed anything which indicates they are susceptible to heat-related illness? E.g. taking certain medications; pregnancy; suffering from a condition or illness such as diabetes, obesity, or heart disease; has previously suffered from a heat-related illness; at higher risk of dehydration or electrolyte depletion; age – younger (aged 25 or under) or older (aged 55 or more).
- **Heatwaves:** Heatwaves may pose more risks because they affect your sleep increasing fatigue and affecting your ability to perform work safely and effectively.

3. CONTROL THE RISK

Your employer must do everything reasonably practicable to eliminate the risks associated with working in heat.

- **Can the risk be entirely removed?** Such as cancelling the work task and wait for the hot weather to pass.
- **Can the work be done in a cooler environment?** E.g. move outdoor COVID testing clinic indoors into an airconditioned environment.
- **Can engineering controls be implemented?** Examples include setting up shade tents; installing air-conditioning, or portable air-conditioners where air-conditioning is out of order; making sure your workspace has good air flow; providing air-conditioned, shaded or cool break areas, especially where required to eat outdoors to manage COVID-19 risks; providing accessible cool drinking water or, when necessary, electrolyte solutions.

If risks remain, then your employer should also use administrative controls such as scheduling more physically demanding activities to be completed in the cooler parts of the day.

Hydration

When working in heat, dehydration is a major risk. Your employer must ensure you have access to cool drinking water and encourage you to stay hydrated. This includes people working in the community. This is more important than ever when you are working for long periods in PPE.



4. REVIEW

Your employer must review the controls that have been put in place to manage the risks of working in heat to make sure they are effective. You should be consulted as part of this review.

What can I do if I believe that there are heat related risks to my health and safety at work?



1. Raise your concerns through the normal channels in your workplace.

Be sure to do this in writing. This may include things like putting in an incident report (or reporting a near miss) in your incident reporting system and sending an email to your manager. It will assist in resolution of the concerns if you are able to measure and document temperatures in the work environment



2. Talk to your Health and Safety representative (if you have one) about your concerns



3. If the issue remains unresolved, contact the NSWMA for more advice and assistance on (02) 8595 1234 or gensec@nswma.asn.au

