



NEWS

JB Pritzker, Governor

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Illinois Department of Labor Warns of Heat Hazards on the Job *Heat-related illness can be deadly*

SPRINGFIELD – Summer doesn't officially start for a few more days, but sometimes the heat and humidity don't pay attention to the calendar. It is dangerous – even deadly – for workers not to pay attention to hot, humid conditions.

“Understandably, much of our safety concerns of late have been focused on COVID-19, but we must not overlook other dangers in the workplace. Excessive heat and humidity pose a serious threat to our workers, claiming lives every year,” said Illinois Department of Labor Director Michael Kleinik.

Millions of workers nationwide work in potentially dangerous heat conditions, and as construction season ramps up in Illinois, working in outdoor heat and humidity is a serious concern.

Early summer is the time to focus on this threat. More than half of outdoor, heat-related deaths occur in the first few days of working in hot situations because the body needs to build a tolerance to heat gradually. Workers that do not acclimatize to the heat and humidity face a much greater risk factor for serious injury or death.

Despite being preventable, heat illness kills an average of more than 600 people each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The overall public health impact is hard to estimate as heat-related illnesses, such as heat stroke and heat exhaustion, are not required to be reported to public health agencies.

While heat affects everyone, it especially poses a danger to those who must do physical labor in the heat and humidity – indoors or outdoors. Heat stroke is the most serious heat-related health problem and can be fatal if not recognized and treated quickly.

Symptoms of heat stroke include:

- Confusion
- High body temperature (103°F or higher)

- Hot, red, dry, or damp skin
- Fast, strong pulse
- Headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Confusion
- Loss of consciousness (passing out)

If a worker shows signs of heat stroke, consider it a medical emergency and call 911. Assist the victim to a shaded, cooler place, and help lower their temperature with cool cloths or a cool bath.

Heat stroke doesn't arrive without warning signs. A worker suffering from heat exhaustion may experience dizziness, nausea, headache, heavy sweating, muscle cramps and weakness.

Certain factors can make individuals more susceptible. People 65 and older, people who are overweight and people with underlying conditions such as heart disease or diabetes are more likely to fall victim to heat-related illness. Certain behaviors, such as drinking alcohol or taking medications can impede normal perspiration, the key to body temperature regulation, adding to the danger.

Employers should train workers and supervisors to recognize the symptoms of heat-related illness and to immediately report anyone exhibiting heat-related distress. It is vital that cool water be made available and that workers are encouraged to drink small amounts on a regular basis to combat thirst. Regular meals and snacks are also important to keep electrolytes in balance.

Schedule frequent rest periods with water breaks in shaded areas – air-conditioned areas if possible. Use fans where possible to help the body's natural cooling system to work more efficiently.

For the past 10 years, the federal Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) has waged a campaign to combat heat-related illness among workers. OSHA's training materials provide a simple and effective three-word strategy that can save lives -- Water. Rest. Shade. <https://www.osha.gov/heat/>

For more information on Illinois OSHA, a division of IDOL, visit <https://www2.illinois.gov/idol/Laws-Rules/safety/Pages/default.aspx>.