

# MOHSS

## Montana Occupational Health & Safety Surveillance

July 2023

### *Heat Stress*



July holds some of the hottest summer days in Montana. Even though the weather in July is beautiful, it is important to understand the risks of high temperatures and outdoor activities. This is especially important for workers whose jobs require outdoor labor. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has termed this phenomenon “Heat Stress”.<sup>i</sup> Heat stress can put workers at increased risk of heat-related injury and illness. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website references six different types of Heat Stress, including

Heat Stroke, Heat Exhaustion, Rhabdomyolysis, Heat Syncope, Heat Cramps, and Heat Rash.<sup>ii</sup> It is important for workers to pay attention to the signs and symptoms of heat stress. According to the CDC’s Heat and Health Tracker website, there are over 700 heat-related deaths and nearly 70,000 emergency department visits in the United States annually. Many experts believe that those numbers will increase over time.<sup>iii</sup>

Heavy sweating, dizziness, and light-headedness indicate heat stress brought on by a combination of exposure and/or exertion. If a worker doesn’t mitigate their body temperature, this can lead to several potentially life-threatening scenarios, including heat stroke. Workers with heavy labor and exposure to intense sunlight are especially prone to heat-related injuries. Once the symptoms of heat stress set in, the risk of falls is elevated.

Several important tips can help workers avoid the unhealthy effects of heat stress. First, and most importantly, drink plenty of water. Dehydration is one of the biggest factors in heat stress. Since our sweat is made primarily of water, staying hydrated is crucial, especially when temperatures and exertion are high. Consider carrying an insulated water bottle with you to the job site. It is best to avoid sugary beverages since they can have the effect of dehydrating you further. Second, wear breathable work clothes when possible. This will allow the body’s natural cooling to be more efficient. It may be a good idea to wear a hat. Third, take breaks in the shade as often as is feasible. If you start experiencing light-



Photo by Joan Tran on Unsplash



headedness or dizziness, tell your manager immediately, as these are strong indicators of heat stress. Be especially aware of these symptoms before operating heavy equipment or while working in places with severe fall-risk.

The best way to avoid work related heat stress is to listen to your body. If you begin experiencing symptoms, alert your manager right away. Severe heat stress can be fatal.

Be safe and we'll see you next month!

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/heatstress>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/heatstress/heatrelillness.html>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://ephtracking.cdc.gov/Applications/heatTracker>

