

Pinnacol Pointers for Safety Group Programs

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Editor's Note: Safety Group Program Monthly Newsletter Article – May 2015
Contact: Mindy Carrothers (303.361.4790, mindy.carrothers@pinnacol.com)

Heat Illness Awareness

Even though it's been cool and rainy recently, Colorado weather can change quickly and drastically. It won't be long before the heat will sneak up on us, so start being proactive and prepare for warm weather by learning how you can prevent heat-related illnesses. You should become familiar with this information straight from NIOSH to help you protect yourself and your workers from the hazards of summer heat.

NIOSH recommends that employees:

- Drink water every 15 minutes, even if they're not thirsty;
- Cool down by resting in the shade
- Wear a hat and light-colored clothing
- Take it easy on the first days of work in the heat. Their bodies need to get used to it.

Make sure you're aware of which types of heat-related injuries could affect your employees. Keep the table below from NIOSH handy so you're familiar with some common heat-related illnesses, the symptoms of each and what to do in an emergency.

Remember, if you're not a medical professional; the following chart is simply a guide to help workers in need and should not be considered comprehensive. Every situation should be accessed on a case by case basis.

Illness	Symptoms	First Aid
Heat stroke: The body becomes unable to control its temperature, which rises rapidly, the sweating mechanism fails, and the body is unable to cool down. When heat stroke occurs, the body temperature can rise to 106 degrees Fahrenheit or higher within 10 to 15 minutes. Heat stroke can cause death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not given.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hot, dry skin or profuse sweating ▪ Hallucinations ▪ Chills ▪ Throbbing headache ▪ High body temperature ▪ Confusion/dizziness ▪ Slurred speech 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Call 911 and notify supervisor. ▪ Move worker to a cool shaded area. ▪ Cool the worker using methods such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Soaking their clothes with water. - Spraying, sponging, or showering them with water. - Fanning their body.
Heat exhaustion: This is the body's response to an excessive loss of the water and salt, usually through excessive sweating. Workers most prone to heat exhaustion are those that are elderly, have high blood pressure, and those working in a hot environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Heavy sweating ▪ Extreme weakness or fatigue ▪ Dizziness, confusion ▪ Nausea ▪ Clammy, moist skin ▪ Pale or flushed complexion ▪ Muscle cramps ▪ Slightly elevated body temperature ▪ Fast and shallow breathing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Have them rest in a cool, shaded or air-conditioned area. ▪ Have them drink plenty of water or other cool, nonalcoholic beverages. ▪ Have them take a cool shower, bath, or sponge bath.

<p>Heat cramps: These usually affect workers who sweat a lot during strenuous activity. This sweating depletes the body's salt and moisture levels. Low salt levels in muscles causes painful cramps. Heat cramps may also be a symptom of heat exhaustion.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Muscle pain or spasms usually in the abdomen, arms, or legs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Stop all activity, and sit in a cool place. ▪ Drink clear juice or a sports beverage. ▪ Do not return to strenuous work for a few hours after the cramps subside because further exertion may lead to heat exhaustion or heat stroke. ▪ Seek medical attention if any of the following apply: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The worker has heart problems. - The worker is on a low-sodium diet. - The cramps do not subside within one hour.
<p>Heat rash: A skin irritation caused by excessive sweating during hot, humid weather.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Heat rash looks like a red cluster of pimples or small blisters. ▪ It is more likely to occur on the neck and upper chest, in the groin, under the breasts, and in elbow creases. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Try to work in a cooler, less humid environment when possible. ▪ Keep the affected area dry. ▪ Dusting powder may be used to increase comfort.
<p>Heat Syncope: A fainting episode or dizziness that usually occurs with prolonged standing or sudden rising from a sitting or lying position. Factors that may contribute to heat syncope include dehydration and lack of acclimatization.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Light-headedness ▪ Dizziness ▪ Fainting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sit or lie down in a cool place when they begin to feel symptoms. ▪ Slowly drink water, clear juice, or a sports beverage.

Source: "Heat Stress." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/heatstress/>

To be safe this summer, pay attention to the weather forecast and be prepared with a plan of action in the case that an injury occurs.

For more information on avoiding summer workplace hazards, contact Pinnacol Assurance at 303-361-4000 or 1-800-873-7242.