



The Safety Zone

The Newsletter of the AHA Workers' Compensation Self-Insured Trust

Heatstroke Redefined

Learn about 'exertional' heatstroke

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) has, for the first time since 1986, updated its *Criteria for a Recommended Standard: Occupational Exposure to Heat and Hot Environments*. The most significant change is in the definition of "heatstroke."

The accepted definition of "heatstroke" includes confusion, unconsciousness, and/or convulsions, accompanied by a lack of sweating. Workers were warned that if they stopped sweating, heatstroke was imminent. This type of heatstroke, now called "**classic heatstroke**," isn't the type that most commonly strikes workers.

NIOSH says that "**exertional heatstroke**" is more common in workers – and profuse sweating is one of its symptoms. So workers who have been taught that sweating is a positive sign are actually at increased risk.

Exertional heatstroke is caused by the combination of heat exposure and heavy physical exertion, and can lead to a condition called **rhabdomyolysis**. Symptoms of rhabdomyolysis include muscle pain and cramping, swelling, weakness and decreased range of motion. Fatigue, abdominal pain, back pain, nausea or vomiting, and confusion may also occur. However, many cases occur with very mild symptoms that are mistaken for heat stress. This creates a potentially dangerous situation

because these workers don't receive the intensive medical intervention they require.

Another potential complication of rhabdomyolysis is **compartment syndrome**, or swelling in a specific type of muscle,



"Welcome, welcome...and remember, everyone, stay hydrated!"

Continued

news & notes

THE HEAT IS ON

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) says these factors make workers susceptible to heat illness:

Age. Older workers are at increased risk of heat illness, and acclimatization is less effective in older workers. NIOSH suggests that working for shorter periods between breaks can help protect these workers.

Pregnancy. Pregnant women have a higher-than-normal body temperature throughout pregnancy, and heat tolerance decreases as pregnancy progresses.

Obesity. Obese individuals are 3.5 times more likely to suffer heat illness than other workers.

Medication. Both illegal and prescription drugs can affect the body's fluid balance and thermoregulation. Ask your doctor or pharmacist about the effects of your medication on heat tolerance.

Alcohol significantly reduces heat tolerance and should be avoided.

Regarding caffeine: Recent studies show that caffeinated fluids have an effect on fluid balance similar to that of water, so a cup of coffee shouldn't increase your risk.

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AHAWCSIT



419 Natural Resources Drive
Little Rock, AR 72205

AHA Services, Inc.

Tina Creel, Group Manager
Phone: 501-224-7878
Fax: 501-224-0519

Risk Management Resources

Phone: 501-664-7705
Fax: 501-664-4849

Linda Collins, COO
Phone: 501-614-1108

RMR Loss Control

Consultants:

Matt Bradshaw, Loss Control
Manager
Phone: 501-614-1165
Cell: 501-614-1465

Don Jack, Loss Control
Consultant
Phone: 501-614-1191
Cell: 501-454-7287

Rusty Freeman, Loss Control
Consultant
501-614-1173

AHAWCSIT Claims Contacts:

Jill Johnson, Claims Director
Phone: 501-614-1112
Fax: 501-614-1412

Tonya Rodgers, Claims
Specialist
Phone: 501-614-1194
Fax: 501-614-1463

Medcor (Injury at work)

800-775-5866

Heatstroke Redefined, continued

usually in the lower extremities, that blocks blood flow. Compartment syndrome is often delayed—it may take several hours to develop—and can lead to permanent loss of function in the affected limb.

Symptoms of compartment syndrome include the “5 Ps”: pain, pallor, pulselessness, paresthesias (sensation of tingling, numbness, or burning, usually felt in the hands, feet, arms, or legs), and paralysis. Pain is the most common and tends to be extremely severe. Workers who experience these symptoms must go to a hospital immediately. Quick surgical intervention is required to treat compartment syndrome.

Both types of heatstroke are accompanied by extremely high body temperature, and both types are medical emergencies that require immediate medical attention. First aid includes cooling the worker as quickly as possible by any means available, including an ice bath, circulating air around the worker, and placing cold packs on the head, neck, armpits, and groin. For exertional heatstroke, oral hydration is vital.

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Got News?

Do you have news that needs to be circulated or have a subject you would like for us to address? Let us know by emailing the newsletter editor at tcreel@arkhospitals.org.

AHA Workers' Compensation Self-Insured Trust Program is administered by Risk Management Resources (RMR), a division of BancorpSouth Insurance Services, Inc. www.bxsi.com. In March 2003 the AHA Workers' Compensation Self-Insured Trust was established. The program provides workers' compensation coverage to AHA members.

Risk Management Resources, the administrator for the program, assists members in the areas of claims management, safety and loss control. Tina Creel, Vice President of AHA Services, Inc., is the Group Manager of the Trust and provides oversight of the day-to-day operation of the Trust.

The Board of Trustees provides oversight of the overall operation of the Group Trust.