Workplace Learning System

Weekly Safety Briefings

Week 26 – Monday, June 22 – Friday, June 26, 2026

Heat Stroke and Dehydration

Introduction – Heat Stroke and Dehydration

Introduction for Leaders (Use Before Monday's Toolbox Talk)

Purpose for Supervisors:

This week, the topic is heat stroke and dehydration, two heat-related hazards that can escalate quickly and, in serious cases, become life-threatening. These aren't rare freak events. They happen every summer to workers in environments just like ours, often because the early warning signs were brushed off or not recognized at all. Our goal this week is to make sure every person on this team knows the signs, knows what to do, and feels comfortable speaking up when something doesn't look right.

How Leaders Should Frame This Week's Toolbox Talks:

- Make it personal and immediate. Heat is easy to underestimate because most of us have pushed through a hot day before and been fine. The goal is to help people understand when pushing through stops being tough and starts being dangerous.
- Remind the team that looking out for each other matters here. Someone in the early stages of heat illness may not recognize it themselves; their judgment is often the first thing affected.
- Cover the basics of your site's heat illness prevention program this week: where water is located, what the rest and shade policy is, and who to go to if someone is showing symptoms.

Monday – How Heat Affects the Body

Discussion:

Let's talk about what happens to your body when it gets too hot. Most of us know heat is dangerous in an abstract way, but understanding the mechanics of it, how things go wrong, and how fast makes it a lot easier to take it seriously. Your body has one job when it comes to temperature: keep your core at around 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit. It does that primarily by sweating. Sweat evaporates off your skin, and that process pulls heat away from your body. Simple system, but it has limits. When the heat is extreme, when humidity is high, and sweat can't evaporate, or when you haven't had enough water to keep sweating, that cooling system starts to fail. And when your core temperature rises unchecked, things go wrong fast.

Here is how the progression typically looks:

Heat cramps are usually the first sign that something is off. Your muscles start cramping often in the legs, arms, or abdomen because you've been sweating out electrolytes faster than you're replacing them. This is your body telling you to slow down and hydrate. Most people push through it. That's where the trouble starts.

Heat exhaustion sets in as things escalate. You start to feel weak, dizzy, and nauseous. You might be sweating heavily, your skin may look pale and feel clammy, and your heart rate climbs. Some people get a headache or feel faint. This is a serious warning that your body's cooling system is struggling. Getting out of the heat, resting, and hydrating at this stage can prevent things from going further.

Workplace Learning System

Weekly Safety Briefings

Week 26 – Monday, June 22 – Friday, June 26, 2026

Heat Stroke and Dehydration

Heat stroke is the emergency. Your core temperature has climbed to 104 degrees or higher, and your body can no longer cool itself. At this stage, sweating may actually stop. Skin becomes hot and dry or flushed and still sweating, depending on the type. Confusion, slurred speech, and loss of consciousness are all possible. Heat stroke is a medical emergency. Without immediate intervention, it can cause permanent organ damage or death. Call 911 immediately and start cooling the person down right away.

A real-world example:

During a mid-summer paving job, a crew member named Ellis mentioned he had a headache and felt a little off but said it was nothing and kept working. An hour later, a coworker noticed Ellis was stumbling slightly and not making sense when he talked. By the time they got him to shade and called for help, his skin was hot to the touch, and he was barely responsive. He recovered, but it took days, and it could have been far worse. The headache was the warning. Nobody acted on it, including Ellis himself. That's the moment we want people to catch.

Team member engagement:

"Has anyone ever felt the early signs of heat illness on the job a headache, dizziness, cramps and kept going anyway? What was your thinking at the time?"

<u>Tuesday – Dehydration: The Hazard You Don't Feel Coming</u>

Discussion:

Here's something a lot of people don't know: by the time you feel thirsty, you're already dehydrated. Thirst is a late signal, not an early one. Your body starts losing performance physically and mentally before you ever feel the urge to drink. That makes dehydration one of the sneakiest hazards we deal with in hot environments. On a hot day doing physical work, you can lose one to two liters of fluid per hour through sweat alone. If you're not actively replacing that, your blood thickens, your heart must work harder to pump it, and your muscles and brain get less of what they need. Decision-making slows down. Reaction time drops. Fatigue sets in earlier. And your body becomes much less able to regulate temperature, which is exactly what puts you at risk for heat exhaustion and heat stroke.

Practical hydration guidance for hot workdays:

- Drink water before you start. Come in hydrated, not playing catch-up from the moment you clock in.
- Aim for 8 ounces of water every fifteen to twenty minutes during heavy work in the heat. Don't wait until you're thirsty.
- Avoid energy drinks and excessive caffeine. They can contribute to dehydration and mask the fatigue your body uses as a signal to slow down.
- Check your urine color. Dark yellow or amber means you're behind on fluids. Light yellow is where you want to be. It's not a glamorous check, but it's one of the most reliable ones.
- If you've been sweating heavily for extended periods, water alone may not be enough. Sports drinks or electrolyte supplements can help replace what sweat takes out.

- Watch out for coworkers who don't seem to be drinking. Some people underestimate their fluid needs, especially early in the season before they're acclimatized.

A real-world example:

A landscaping crew working through a hot, humid afternoon had water available at the truck, but the work area was a long walk away, and nobody wanted to stop and make the trip. By early afternoon, two crew members had headaches, and one was cramping. When their supervisor realized no one had taken a water break in over two hours, she called an immediate stop, walked the water out to the crew, and restructured the afternoon so breaks rotated more frequently, and water was brought to the work area rather than the other way around. Small logistical fix, big impact. Sometimes the barrier to hydration isn't will it's convenience.

Team member engagement:

"On a typical hot workday, how much water do you think you actually drink? And how does that compare to what we just talked about? What gets in the way of drinking enough?"

Challenge for the day:

Hydration Check:

- *"Before you leave today, drink a full glass of water. Tomorrow morning, before you start work, do the same. Let's build the habit from the front end of the day, not the back end when you're already behind."*

<u>Wednesday – Recognizing the Signs in Yourself and Your Crew</u>

Discussion:

One of the most important things to understand about heat illness is that the person experiencing it is often the last one to know. Confusion and impaired judgment are symptoms of heat stroke, which means that by the time things are serious, the affected person may not be able to accurately assess their own condition. That's why recognizing symptoms in your teammates is just as important as recognizing them in yourself. Today, let's go through the key signs to watch for, so that every person on this team is equipped to spot trouble early in themselves and in the person working next to them.

Signs of heat exhaustion to watch for:

- Heavy sweating, or, in contrast, skin that has suddenly stopped sweating when the conditions still call for it, pale, cool, or clammy skin
- Weakness, fatigue, or feeling like the legs are giving out, dizziness or lightheadedness, especially when standing, nausea or vomiting
- Headache that won't go away

Signs that heat stroke may be occurring — call 911 immediately:

- Confusion, slurred speech, or unusual behavior, hot, dry skin, or hot skin that is still sweating, but the person seems disoriented, the person saying they "feel fine" while visibly not being fine
- Core temperature at or above 104 degrees Fahrenheit
- Loss of consciousness or seizure

What to do while waiting for help:

- Move the person to a cool, shaded area immediately
- Remove excess clothing and apply cool water to the skin, especially the neck, armpits, and groin, where blood vessels are close to the surface
- If they are conscious and able to swallow, offer cool water in small sips. Do not force fluids
- Stay with them. Do not leave an impaired person alone.

A real-world example:
On a roofing crew working through a mid-afternoon heat spike, a coworker named Gerald noticed that James, one of the most experienced guys on the team, had gone unusually quiet and was moving slowly. Gerald asked if he was okay. James said he was fine. But Gerald had worked with James for three years and knew that wasn't how James moved. He told the foreman what he'd observed, and within a few minutes, James was in the shade with water. He had a core temperature of 102 and was showing early heat exhaustion signs. Because Gerald trusted what he saw over what James said, a serious situation was caught before it became critical.

Team member engagement:
"If you noticed a coworker showing some of these signs, what would make you hesitate to say something, and what would help you act faster?"

Challenge for the day:
Know Your Teammate:

- *"Today, pay a little extra attention to the people working near you. If someone seems off — quieter than usual, slower, pale — say something. You don't have to diagnose anyone. You just have to notice and speak up."*

Thursday – Prevention: Setting the Day Up Right

Discussion:
Everything we've talked about this week, the stages of heat illness, how fast dehydration sets in, how to spot symptoms, all of it is in service of one goal: keeping people from getting to that point in the first place. And the good news is that heat illness is one of the most preventable hazards we face. The controls are straightforward. The challenge is being consistent about using them, especially when the heat feels manageable and taking a break feels unnecessary. Prevention doesn't happen by accident. It happens because leaders build it into how the day runs, and because team members hold each other to it even when the pressure to push through is real.

The core prevention framework is Water, Rest, Shade:

Water needs to be close, cold, and consumed before thirst sets in. Roughly 8 ounces every fifteen to twenty minutes is the standard during heavy outdoor work in the heat. Making it easy to access long walks back to the cooler is a reason people don't drink enough.
Rest breaks need to be scheduled, not just when someone feels bad enough to ask for one. Pre-schedule breaks during the hottest part of the day, typically between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., when UV and heat index are highest. Shorter, more frequent breaks are more effective than waiting for a single long midday break.
Shade or a cool area should always be identified before work begins. It doesn't have to be air-conditioned; shade alone drops the effective temperature significantly. Know where it is before you need it.

A few additional prevention factors that often get overlooked:

- Acclimatization matters. Workers new to hot environments or returning after time off need one to two weeks of gradually increasing heat exposure before their bodies adjust. Don't put a newly onboarded employee into full heat exposure on day one.
- Certain medications and health conditions significantly increase heat risk, including heart conditions, blood pressure medications, diuretics, and others. Encourage team members to talk to their doctor about heat exposure if they're on medication.
- Wearing appropriate clothing helps. Light-colored, loose-fitting, breathable fabric keeps more heat off the body than dark, tight, or heavy clothing.

A real-world example:
A construction site supervisor named Patrice started checking the local heat index forecast every morning before the crew arrived. On days when the heat index was projected to reach 100 or higher, she restructured the schedule to push the heaviest physical work to the early morning hours, set a mandatory 10-minute shade break every hour, and assigned a designated person to ensure the water cooler was stocked and visible. Over the course of a brutal summer, her crew had zero heat-related incidents. The site next to theirs had three. The difference wasn't the weather. It was the plan.

Team member engagement:
"Looking at our current setup, water access, break schedules, shade, what's working well? And is there anything that makes it harder than it should be to stay on top of prevention during a hot day?"

Challenge for the day:
Prevention Check:

- *"Before work starts today, confirm where water is, where shade is, and when breaks are. If any of those answers are unclear, get them clear before the heat of the day arrives."*

Friday – Week Wrap-Up

Discussion:

This week, we covered a lot of ground on a hazard that can move from uncomfortable to dangerous to life-threatening faster than most people expect. We talked about how the body loses its ability to cool itself and what that progression looks like. We talked about dehydration and why waiting until you're thirsty is already too late. We went through the signs to watch for in yourself and in the people working around you. And we talked about the simple but non-negotiable prevention framework, water, rest, shade, and what it takes to actually build that into the workday.

Workplace Learning System

Weekly Safety Briefings

Week 26 – Monday, June 22 – Friday, June 26, 2026

Heat Stroke and Dehydration

The thing about heat illness is that it is almost entirely preventable. The hazard is real, but so are the controls. What stands between a hot day and a medical emergency is usually just a series of small decisions to drink before you're thirsty, to take the break before you feel like you need it, to say something when a coworker doesn't look right. Those decisions are in our hands every single shift.

Team member engagement:

Let's close out the week together. A few questions to bring it home:

- *"What is one thing from this week that you didn't know before, or that landed differently than you expected?"*
- *"Is there anything about how we currently manage heat and hydration on this team that you think we should change or improve?"*
- *"What would you do right now if you saw a coworker showing signs of heat exhaustion? Walk us through it."*
- *"What's one habit around hydration or taking breaks that you want to be more consistent about going forward?"*