

It's Not Just the Heat!

Risks plus heat raise the odds you get sick on the job.

Heat can make anyone sick, but people with chronic conditions are at higher risk of heat-related illness, which can lead to disability or death. There are many work-related health hazards that can also put workers at risk in hot temperatures. Be aware of them to protect yourself on hot days and throughout the year.



Heart risks

Work-related risks: Exposure to chemicals, heavy metals like lead or arsenic, carbon monoxide and smoke or fumes are all bad for your heart.

In the heat: The heart works extra hard on hot days, putting people with cardiovascular disease or high blood pressure at risk. If you take medicine for high blood pressure you might be more prone to heat-related illness.



Lung risks

Work-related risks: Some tasks put you at risk of work-related asthma, COPD, and occupational lung diseases. Spraying chemicals, breathing fumes, grinding, blasting, cutting, or working with animals or crops are examples of tasks that can affect lung health.

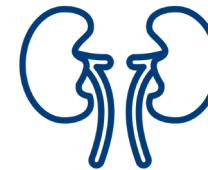
In the heat: Breathing becomes more difficult when it's hot. People with asthma, COPD and other breathing problems have more medical emergencies during hot weather. Allergy and cold medications can reduce your heat tolerance.



Pain and stress

Work-related risks: Pain and stress are daily realities for many workers. They can be bad for heart health. Workers might also use medications (painkillers), drugs, cigarettes, vapes, chew or alcohol to cope.

In the heat: Alcohol, certain prescription medications, and illicit drugs dehydrate the body and put workers at higher risk of heat-related illness. Cigarettes, vapes, and chew have cardiovascular effects that reduce heat tolerance.



Kidneys

Work-related risks: Exposure to lead and other workplace toxins takes a toll on your kidneys.

In the heat: Long hours in hot weather are also hard on the kidneys, putting many outdoor workers at risk for chronic kidney disease. Workers who take medication for kidney disease or people on dialysis also have more risk for heat-related illness.



Bathroom breaks

Work-related risks: Many workers avoid drinking as much water as they should because they don't have easy access to a bathroom on the job or don't think they have time to use it.

Being under-hydrated over time puts the kidneys at risk.

In the heat: During hot weather, being dehydrated can be life threatening. Overactive bladder medications put workers at higher risk for heat-related illness.

Prepare to Keep Cool.

Protect yourself from these risks all year long.



Heart risks

To reduce risk:

- Use chemicals according to safety instructions.
- Use specialized equipment and techniques (wet methods, equipment hoods) to minimize exposure to dusts and chemicals.
- Keep equipment in good working order.
- Work with your doctor to make a medication plan for hot days.



Lung risks

To reduce risk:

- Turn off engines or other equipment when not in use.
- Use appropriate respiratory protection and ventilation systems to prevent breathing fumes and dust.
- Pay attention to shortness of breath, especially on hot days.
- Follow the suggestions under Heart Risks.
- Participate in workplace medical respiratory screening programs when available.



Pain and stress

To reduce risk:

- Take care of your mental health; seek treatment for substance use if needed.
- Drink more water than you think you need. You need more water if you recently drank alcohol or took medications or drugs that can dehydrate you.
- Always avoid drug and alcohol use on the job.
- Work with your doctor on a medication plan for hot days.
- Work shouldn't have to hurt. Report pain and injuries immediately. Talk to your employer or your union about making your work pain-free.



Kidneys

To reduce risk:

- Stay hydrated with water.
- Eat healthy meals; this will replenish your electrolytes. If you don't have time for meals during hours of sweaty activity, consider a sports drink.
- Work with your medical care provider to plan your hydration carefully if you have kidney disease.
- Avoid energy drinks, sodas or other sugary drinks. They can make things worse.
- Follow workplace safety practices to minimize harmful exposures.



Bathroom breaks

To reduce risk:

- Everyone needs regular bathroom breaks at work. Insist on this and drink water continuously on hot days. You'll sweat a lot of it off anyway.
- Employers need to allow for regular bathroom breaks and bathroom access as both an OSHA requirement and a life-saving intervention.

Water. Rest. Shade.

Plan for the heat.

Practice heat safety and watch for signs of heat-related illness.



Heat safety tips:

- Go slow to go fast! People need to work more slowly in hot weather to avoid medical emergencies.
- Take regular breaks in a cool place.
- Team up; watch each other for signs of illness.
- Report symptoms of heat stress immediately.
- Use shade and cooling techniques. Try misters, cooling clothes, and cloths soaked in cold water. Wear light colors and a wide brimmed hat.
- Know your personal risks.
- Schedule work for cooler times of day if possible.
- Drink lots of water—more than you think you need!
- Ask management to consult the OSHA Heat Stress Guide. They can use this to keep everyone healthy when it's hot.

Signs of Heat Exhaustion	Signs of Heat Stroke
Faint or dizzy	Throbbing headache, confusion
Lots of sweating	Not sweating
Cool, pale, clammy skin	Body temperature above 104°
Nausea or vomiting	Nausea or vomiting
Rapid, weak pulse	Rapid, strong pulse
Muscle cramps	May lose consciousness
Move to shade, give first aid.	CALL 9-1-1 Immediately cool them down.

Division of Public Health

Bureaus of Community Health Promotion and Environmental and Occupational Health
Climate and Health Program, Occupational Health and Safety Program, and Chronic Disease Prevention Program
P-03815 (08/2026) dhs.wisconsin.gov/disease/chronic-disease.htm



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