Summer heat safety

University of Victoria | Occupational Health, Safety and Environment

During the summer months there may be periods where the temperature rises above a comfortable range for work settings. When heat is combined with other factors like physical activity, air temperature, relative humidity, loss of fluids or fatigue, it can make indoor and outdoor environments uncomfortable.

Here are a few tips to reduce discomfort and to help stay cool during hot weather:

- Hydrate yourself. Drinking water will help your body adjust to higher temperatures.
- Use a fan to keep the surrounding air moving.
- Eat smaller but more frequent meals or snacks during the day.
- Wear light clothing that permits the evaporation of sweat (e.g., cotton clothing).
- Vary your work/rest schedule. Take more breaks as needed to help keep cool and hydrated.
- Avoid strenuous physical activity and caffeine drinks.
- Also note that some medications including hypotensives, diuretics, sedatives, antidepressants and amphetamines decrease the body's ability to cope with heat.

If you have any concerns about conditions in your work environment please notify your supervisor.

HIGHER RISK ACTIVITIES (heat stress prevention)

Some jobs at UVic involve greater physical activity, heavier protective clothing and outdoor work. Units should have procedures in place to prevent heat stress to workers engaged in higher risk activities, including:

- Drink at least one cup of water every 20 to 30 minutes, even if you don’t feel thirsty.
- Use mechanical aids for manual lifting where possible (e.g. dollies, carts, etc.)
- Use cooling fans where possible.
- Schedule in advance appropriate work/rest cycles. Take breaks as needed and decrease your pace of work. If you feel tired, weak, or dizzy, take a break.
- Reschedule outdoor and hardest physical tasks for the coolest part of the day; relocate work away from direct sunlight or radiant heat sources whenever possible; rotate work activities or use additional workers to reduce heat exposure for each person.
- Heat stress can increase when physical work is done at temperatures above 31 degrees. Don't push yourself beyond your limits.
- Wear sunscreen and a hat if working outside.
- If you experience any symptoms of heat stress, respond by taking a break and drinking water. Notify your supervisor immediately of your symptoms.
- Sometimes people don’t notice their own heat stress symptoms. If you notice that a worker has any symptoms listed below in the Heat stress guide, take them to a cool place and arrange for first aid immediately by contacting Campus Security at 250-721-7599.

INDOOR ENVIRONMENTS

On hotter days, the indoor temperatures in some campus buildings may become uncomfortably warm to perform regular work or learning activities. In these situations, individuals should follow the guidance to reduce discomfort and heat stress which includes keeping hydrated and taking more breaks from physical activity.

Supervisors can also consider a range of options which includes:

- Adjusting, reducing, rescheduling or relocating work tasks, activities or classes
- Remote work (where feasible)
- Adjusting on-campus operating hours of the facility, lab or unit, if possible

MONITORING

The university will monitor local environmental conditions and public health information for potential heat events in the summer months. During periods when temperatures are anticipated to exceed 30°C, or the province issues a heat warning or an extreme heat emergency notification, the university will review potential impacts to campus activities and provide advisories to the community if any campus-wide adjustments are required.

HEAT STRESS GUIDE

Heat stress symptoms are a set of natural signals telling you that something needs to be done to balance your body's heating and cooling. As your body heats up, it tries to rid itself of excess heat through the evaporation of sweat. If it is unable to cool itself this way, your body temperature will increase. The causes, symptoms, and treatment of various heat-related illnesses are listed below:

Problems & symptoms	Treatment	Prevention
Heat rash (prickly heat) Tingling and burning of the skin, red itchy rash. Sweat glands plugged due ot prolonged exposure of skin to heat, humidity, sweat.	▪ move to a cooler environment ▪ thorough drying ▪ cool showers	▪ keep the skin as dry as possible ▪ rest in a cool place ▪ shower often ▪ change clothes frequently ▪ keep skin clean
Heat cramps Painful spasms of muscles that do the hardest work (arms, legs, and abdomen).	▪ move to a cooler environment ▪ massage the muscles ▪ eat salt containing foods (unless to be avoided for medical reasons)	▪ warm up muscles before heavy work ▪ take rest breaks ▪ eat a normal, healthy diet
Feeling faint/light-headed Increased flow of blood to the skin to get rid of excess heat can result in less blood the the brain.	▪ lie down in a cooler environment ▪ drink cool fluids to lower body temperature ▪ call Campus Security for first aid 250-721-7599	▪ drink plenty of fluids at regular intervals ▪ avoid standing still in one position - move around

Heat exhaustion Tired, weak, dizzy, clammy skin, slow weak pulse. Pale or flushed skin colour. Higher than normal heart rate.	▪ move to a cooler environment ▪ lie down with knees raised ▪ drink cool - not cold fluids ▪ call Campus Security for first aid	▪ take 4-7 days to adjust (acclimatize) to the heat ▪ drink plenty of fluids at regular intervals ▪ take rest breaks in a cool place
Heat stroke Person usually stops sweating, body core temperature is high (40-43 degrees celsius), skin is hot and dry. Person experiences headache, dizziness, confusion, may lose consciousness.	▪ this is a medical emergency - call 911 to summon an ambulance and also contact Campus Security	▪ all measures shown above

Please visit WorkSafeBC for more information and resources about heat stress prevention.