

Heat-Related Illnesses

Definition:

Exposure to abnormal or prolonged heat and humidity without relief or adequate fluid intake can cause various heat-related illnesses.

There are three types of heat-related illnesses:

- Heat cramps
- Heat exhaustion
- Heat stroke

Heat Cramps

Definition:

Heat cramps are the mildest form of heat illness and consist of painful muscle cramps and spasms, most often in the calves, arms, abdominal muscles, and back, that occur during or after intense exercise and sweating in high heat.

Symptoms:

- Muscle cramps
- Sweating
- Headache

Treatment:

- Resting
- Cooling-off
- Drinking water, a sports drink, or a similar electrolyte solution
- Light stretching and massage

Heat Exhaustion

Definition:

Heat exhaustion is more severe than heat cramps and results from a loss of water and salt in the body. It occurs in extreme heat conditions and excessive sweating without adequate fluid and salt replacement. Heat exhaustion occurs when the body is unable to cool itself properly and, if left untreated, can progress to heat stroke.

Symptoms:

- Profuse sweating

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Dizziness
- Muscle cramps
- Fatigue
- Feeling faint
- Headache
- Pale skin
- Rapid heartbeat

Treatment:

- Move the person to a cooler environment.
- Have the person lie down.
- Remove as much of the person's clothing as possible.
- Cool the person with a cool water spray. If not available, place cool, damp cloths on the neck, armpit, and groin area.
- Encourage the person to drink something that contains sugar and electrolytes, such as juice, a sports drink, or water, if the latter options are unavailable.

Heat Stroke

Definition:

Heat stroke, the most severe form of heat illness, occurs when the body's heat-regulating system is overwhelmed by excessive heat. It is a life-threatening emergency and requires immediate medical attention.

Symptoms:

- Warm, dry skin
- high fever, usually over 40° C
- Rapid heart rate
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Headache
- Fatigue
- Confusion
- Agitation
- Lethargy
- Stupor
- Seizures, coma, and death are possible

Treatment:

- Move to a cool place and rest.
- Heat stroke is a life-threatening medical emergency and needs to be treated by a doctor.
- Remove excess clothing and drench skin with cool water.
- Place ice bags on the armpits and groin areas.
- Offer cool fluids if the person is alert and able to drink.