

Managing Young people Working in the heat

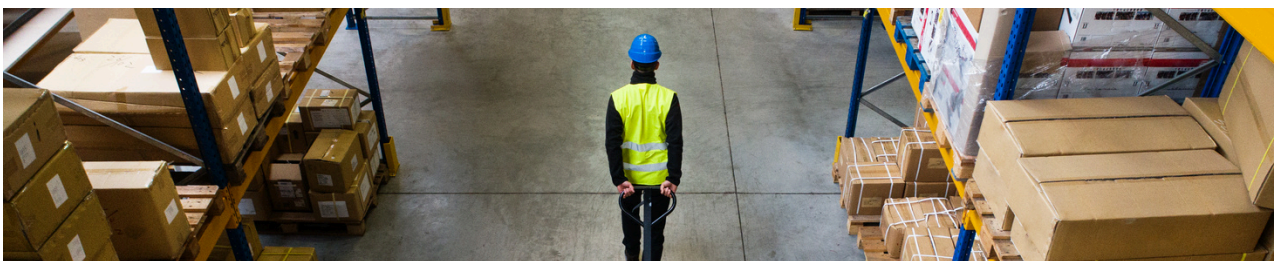


Young Workers

Young workers are one of the most vulnerable cohorts in workplaces due to a combination of inexperience, inadequate training and supervision and being unaware of work health and safety (WHS) rights and responsibilities. On this basis, employers of young workers may need to consider managing and monitoring them differently to older or more experienced workers as it relates to working in the heat and safety.

Providing additional information to younger workers, extending the training given, keeping an eye on them, and reminding them about taking care in extreme heat, is time well spent.

This will help mitigate the risk of heat related illness and injury, and ensure they understand the effects that working in the heat may have. You also need to encourage them to raise any issues with their supervisor or team leader.



Training

Young workers, new to working in the heat, will need a longer time to get used to the heat that workers who have already had some exposure.

- To acclimatise to the heat, you must gradually increase the young person's exposure time to a hot environment over a 7 to 14-day period. New workers will need a longer time to get used to the heat than workers who have already had some exposure. Be careful to not push young people too much, as a person's body can only adapt to the heat to a certain limit.

- Your primary duty of care requires you to educate your young workers. Handing them a policy or procedure does not satisfy this duty. The extent that you need to go to provide information, instruction, training and supervision is dependent on the following factors: The young workers experience; Their maturity; The tasks they are required to complete - the hazards and risks involved; and Safe systems of work available
- Be mindful that you also need to consider your policies and procedures to ensure you keep young workers safe given they may lack experience, knowledge and understanding compared with older workers



Training should include:

- mechanisms of heat exposure
- potential heat exposure situations
- importance of fluid intake
- the nature of acclimatisation
- effects of alcohol and drugs
- early recognition of symptoms of heat illness
- prevention of heat illness
- first aid treatment of heat illnesses
- self-assessment (this is a critical key element)

As employers, having awareness in these differences will help you to understand, anticipate, and manage the behaviour of young people.

Young People are less likely to: Think before they act; Pause to consider the potential consequences of their actions; and modify their dangerous or inappropriate behaviours.

- Ineffective Communication, Induction & Training - Inadequate induction, training and communication methods can increase a young worker's risk of injury.
- Inadequate Supervision & Mentoring - Inadequate supervision and mentoring can also increase the risk of injury to young workers. Young workers who are not supervised or inadequately supervised or left to their own devices are not able to ask questions as they arise whilst working and there is no one ensuring that they are safely and competently completing tasks, both of which are extremely important.



What are some common effects of working in heat?

- Heat rash, leading to skin irritation and discomfort.
- Heat cramps resulting from heavy sweating without replacing salt and electrolytes.
- Fainting, particularly when workers stand or rise from a sitting position.
- Dehydration from increased sweating if workers aren't drinking enough water.
- Heat stroke occurs when the body can no longer cool itself. This can be fatal.
- Burns can occur if a worker comes into contact with hot surfaces or tools.
- Slips, as a worker will sweat more in hot conditions which can increase the risk of
- Reduced concentration, as heat can make it more difficult to concentrate, leading to confusion



Preventing heat illness

The risk can also be minimised by modifying workload. This may include:

- rescheduling work so the hot tasks are performed during the cooler part of the day.

- wearing light clothing that still provides adequate protection, PPE – wide brim hat, loose fitting, long-sleeved collared shirt/long pants, sunglasses, sunscreen
- providing cool drinking water near the work site. During hot weather, workers should be encouraged to drink a cup of water (about 200 mL) every 15 to 20 minutes, and not rely solely on soft drinks or caffeinated drinks
- reducing the time spent doing hot tasks (e.g. job rotation)
- providing extra rest breaks in a cool area
- using mechanical aids to reduce physical exertion



Administrative controls

- Worker selection – Young workers who have become acclimatised to the work environment are at less risk than unacclimatised workers.
- Scheduling of work – where possible, conduct the work:
 - in cooler parts of the year, especially where the work requires protective clothing
 - at night, early morning or late afternoon rather than midday.
- Work-rest intervals:
 - spend rest periods in a cool place with a plentiful supply of cool water for fluid replacement.
- Fluid replacement – critical when working in a hot environment, especially where hard work (metabolic work) is required:
 - encourage young workers to consume water at the start of the shift so as to maximise their hydration status
 - drink small volumes as frequently as possible during work (every 15-20mins)
 - encourage replacement of electrolytes in high sweat scenarios.
- Buddy systems – trained workers can keep an eye on young people for signs of heat effects, reducing risks



Hot Weather Safety Tips for Young People:

- Stay hydrated. Drink plenty of fluids; drink about 200ml every 15-20 minutes
- Avoid dehydrating liquids. Alcohol, coffee, tea and caffeinated soft drinks can hurt more than help.
- Wear protective clothing. Lightweight, light-coloured and loose-fitting clothing helps protect against heat. Change clothing if it gets completely saturated.
- Pace yourself. Slow down and work at an even pace. Know your own limits and ability to work safely in heat.
- Schedule frequent breaks. Take time for rest periods and water breaks in a shaded or air-conditioned area.
- Use a damp rag. Wipe your face or put it around your neck.
- Avoid getting sunburn. Use sunscreen and wear a hat if working outside.
- Be alert to signs of heat-related illness. Know what to look for and check on other workers that might be at high risk.
- Avoid direct sun. Find shade or block out the sun if possible.
- Eat smaller meals. Eat fruits high in fibre and natural juice. Avoid high protein foods.

Further information on Managing the Risks of Working in the Heat can be found at NT WorkSafe and Safe Work Australia.