

Working under heat

A practical guide for workers in Bangkok

Heat can be dangerous, especially when one works outside. In Thailand, extreme heat – already a major workplace/occupational hazard – is expected to become more intense and frequent in years to come. Excessive heat can harm one's health and well-being and affect city infrastructure and services. Workers are most exposed, yet frequently have no choice but to continue working to sustain their livelihoods despite the risks.

It's important to know how to protect yourself when working in extreme heat. Be extra careful when humidity is high because this reduces your body's ability to cool itself. Injuries are also more common at higher temperatures.



Heat-related illnesses can quickly progress from heat exhaustion to heat stroke. Heat stroke is very serious, requires medical attention, and can result in death. Early recognition of symptoms and quick action can prevent heat-related illness. Know the symptoms and act accordingly.





Heat Exhaustion

Symptoms

- Heavy sweating
- Feeling unwell
- Fatigue or weakness
- Headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Muscle cramps

What to do?

- **Move** to a cooler, shaded location and rest.
- **Remove** layers of clothing, including shoes and socks.
- **Cool down** by applying cold, wet cloths or ice to your head, face or neck. These are areas where the body cools down faster.
- **Drink** water slowly. Avoid caffeinated or alcoholic drinks as sugar and caffeine put strain on the heart, liver and kidneys.
- **Get medical help** at the closest hospital, clinic and/or health centre if you vomit, become confused or don't start to feel better.
- **Have someone** stay with you until help arrives.

Heat Stroke

Symptoms

- Hot, dry skin
- Profuse sweating
- Very high body temperature
- Nausea, vomiting
- Throbbing headache
- Rapid heart rate
- Altered mental state: confusion, difficulty speaking, hallucination, seizures, loss of consciousness.

What to do?

- **Seek immediate medical attention** by calling an ambulance or getting support at the closest hospital, clinic and/or health centre.
- **Stay with the worker** until help arrives.
- **Move** to a cooler, shaded location.
- **Remove** as much clothing as possible (socks and shoes too).
- **Cool the worker:** Wet the skin and clothing with cool water. Apply cold, wet cloths or ice to head, face, neck, armpits and groin.
- **Offer sips of cold water**, but do not force the person to drink.

What can you do to prevent heat-related illnesses?



Protect yourself from the heat

- **Time your work:** If possible, do heavy work early in the morning or late in the afternoon when it's cooler.
- **Take breaks:** Find well-ventilated spaces to cool down. Take short but frequent breaks in the shade or a cooler place. If you can, go into places with air-conditioning.
- **Shield from the sun:** In the sun, it can feel 10-15°C hotter. If you work outside, try to set up a shaded structure or umbrella.
- **Stay informed** about official heat warnings.



Keep your home cool

- **Limit oven use:** Use the oven, stove and other electrical appliances as little as possible. Check your appliances to ensure they are not broken or damaged.
- **Close curtains:** Keep shades, blinds or curtains closed during the hottest part of the day. Open windows at night.
- **Save electricity:** If the air conditioner is on, keep doors and windows closed to save electricity and help prevent power outages.
- **Use electric fans only when the temperature is below 40°C.** In temperatures above 40°C, fans will heat the body.



Keep your body cool

- **Drink water:** Carry a water bottle. Drink a few sips frequently and fill the bottle as often as possible.
- **Cover up:** Wear light, loose-fitting clothing, sunglasses and wide-brimmed hats. Choose light coloured and cotton clothing.
- **Use sunscreen:** Apply sunscreen with a high SPF and UVA protection. Re-apply every 2 hours and after sweating.
- **Wet your skin:** Use a damp cloth or wet clothing to keep your skin damp.



Pay attention to food and drink intake

- **Prioritize** lighter foods and smaller meals.
- **Limit spicy food** intake as this can increase your body temperature during heat waves.
- **Limit sugary drinks, alcohol and caffeine** as these can lead to dehydration.



Protect each other

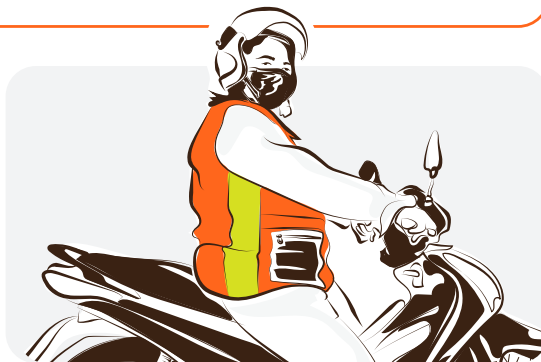
- **Check on each other:** Regularly check on vulnerable people in your circle – especially people over 65 years old, those with a disability or chronic conditions, and those who live alone.
- **Stay in touch:** Make sure someone checks on you too!
- **Inform:** Talk with other workers about the dangers of heat and what you can do to protect yourselves. Consider organizing work routines to support colleagues who feel unwell.



Who is at increased risk?

- Older adults, pregnant women, people with disabilities, children, and those with health problems such as heart disease, diabetes or asthma are at increased risk. Some health problems or medications (like those for heart problems or blood pressure) can make it harder for the body to stay cool or sweat properly.
- People in all occupations are at risk during extreme heat. The working conditions for those in outdoor spaces, such as street vendors and motorcycle taxi drivers, can make them more vulnerable.
- Migrant workers often face additional problems, such as language barriers, discrimination, and difficulties in accessing health care.

Not everyone responds the same to excessive heat, so learn to identify early signs of heat-related illness in yourself and others.



Tips for vulnerable workers:

- Create a support group at your workplace — people who can check on you, and you can check on them.
- Store your medication safely and make plans for medication that may need refrigeration. There may be power outages during heat waves so it is best to be prepared. Share your medical information with someone you trust and/or with your support group.

The 2006 [Thai Occupational Standard](#) orders work interruptions and workplace adjustments in cases where the Wet Bulb Globe Temperature rises above 34°C for low intensity work, 32°C for moderate intensity work, and 30°C for very high intensity work. It mandates employers to deploy personal protective equipment, post warning notices and arrange health check-ups for employees. It does not mention self-employed workers.

These guidelines were developed by [WIEGO](#) and [HomeNet Thailand](#) and reviewed by WIEGO public health specialists and [Workplace Health Without Borders](#). They are based on official recommendations from the [World Health Organization](#), the [US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), the [Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety](#) and the [Mayo Clinic](#).