

Working under heat

A practical guide for workers in Delhi

In India, extreme heat – already a major occupational hazard – is expected to become more intense and frequent in years to come. Workers are most exposed, but despite the risks they frequently have no choice but to continue working to sustain their livelihoods. Early recognition of symptoms and quick action can prevent heat-related illnesses. 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, hallucinations, 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 worker 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 body cool

- **Drink water:** Carry a water bottle. Drink a few sips frequently and fill the bottle as often as possible. Homemade drinks like lassi, torani (rice water), lemon water and buttermilk also help to rehydrate the body.
- **Cover up:** Wear light, loose-fitting, cotton clothing. Use an umbrella, hat, cap towel, and other traditional headgear when exposed to direct sunlight.
- **Do not go out barefoot:** Wear shoes or chappals when outside.
- Wet your skin using a damp cloth or wet light clothing.



Keep your home cool

- **Limit oven use:** Use the oven, stove and other electrical appliances as little as possible.
- **Close curtains:** Keep shades, blinds or curtains closed during the hottest part of the day. Open windows at night.
- **Try to remain on lower floors** during the day.
- **Spray water:** As the water evaporates, it absorbs the heat and cools the surface and surrounding air.



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. Smoking and chewing tobacco are also discouraged.



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, can make them more vulnerable. Women in poorly ventilated kitchens and who work near other indoor heat sources are also at added risk for occupational heat stress.

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



These guidelines were developed by WIEGO and reviewed by WIEGO's public health specialists. They are based on official recommendations from the [World Health Organization](#), [US Centers for Disease and Control Prevention](#), the [Canadian Center for Occupational Health and Safety](#), India's [National Programme on Climate Change and Human Health](#) and the [National Disaster Management Authority](#).

