SafeWork SA

Work in the heat: managing risks

Heat is a hazard in many Australian workplaces, whether the work is indoors or outdoors. When the body cannot cool itself fast enough, a worker can suffer from heat-related illness.

The legislation does not set a 'stop work' temperature

A single 'stop work' temperature would not capture the range of factors that make working in the heat hazardous, such as humidity, air flow, the type of work, and whether controls can be implemented. In some workplaces, a 'heat clause' is included in employment agreements, however risks associated with heat still need to be managed so far as is reasonably practicable by the person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU).

Heat-related illnesses [1]

Heat rash – a skin irritation caused by excessive sweating

Heat cramp – muscle pains or spasms, which can be a sign of heat exhaustion

Heat syncope – fainting or sudden dizziness caused by reduced blood flow

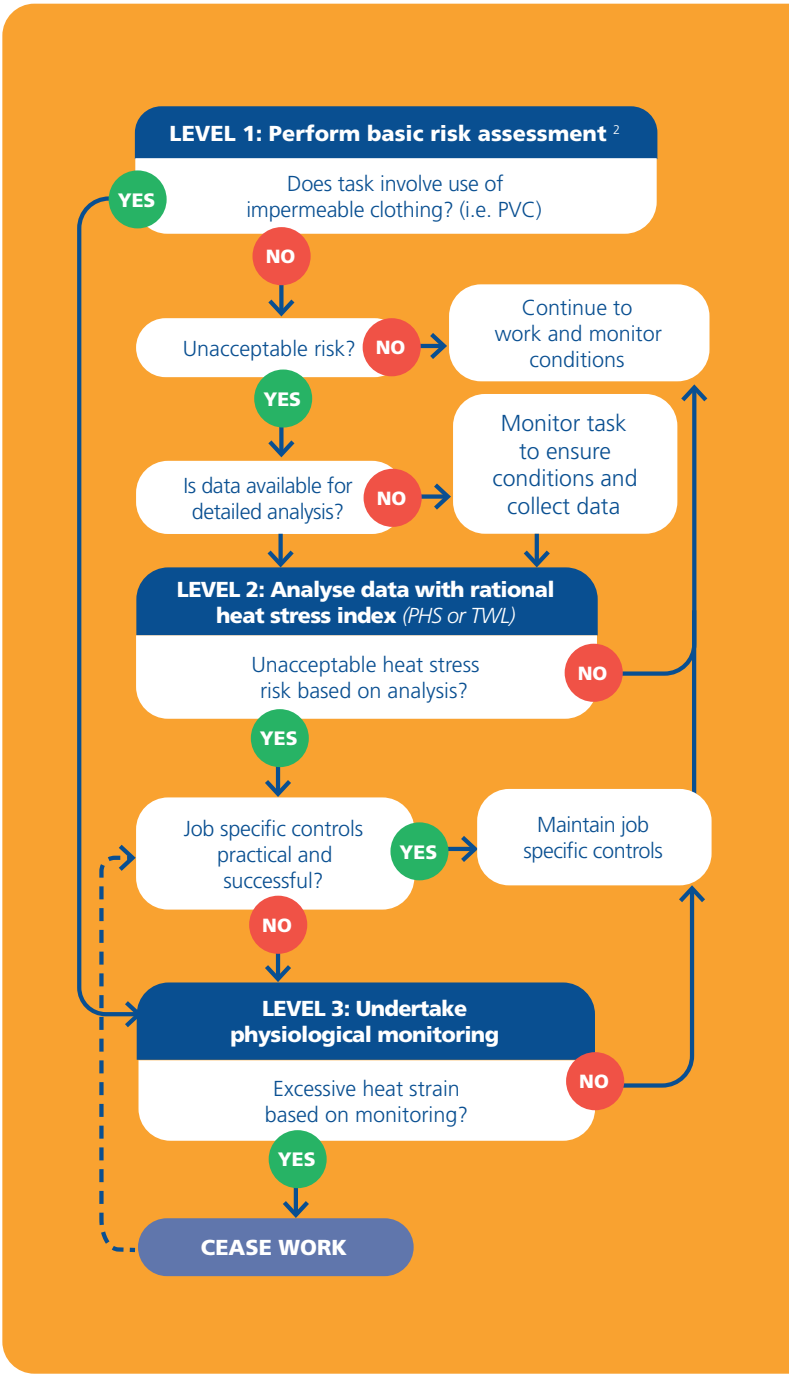
Heat hangover – a chronic illness that includes fatigue-like symptoms after repeated exposure to moderate to high temperatures

Heat exhaustion – a serious condition affecting the body's ability to cool itself, which can lead to heat stroke

Heat stroke – a medical emergency that needs urgent attention. The body's temperature rises above 40°C and its internal systems start to shut down

Assessing the risk

The impact of extreme temperatures on workers will depend on the individual worker, the work they are doing, and the environmental conditions. The Australian Institute of Occupational Hygienists recommends a three-stage approach to risk assessment. Use the following approach to identify heat stress factors in your workplace *(Di Corleto et al 2013)*.



Controlling the risk

A PCBU must first consider whether a risk can be completely removed from the workplace. If it is not reasonably practicable to eliminate the risk, the PCBU must minimise risks, as far as is reasonably practicable. This involves one or more of substituting the hazard, isolating the hazard, or implementing engineering controls.

If a risk then remains, the PCBU must minimise the remaining risk, so far as is reasonably practicable, by implementing administrative controls. For a remaining risk, the PCBU must ensure the provision and use of suitable personal protective equipment (PPE).

If you think someone has heat exhaustion or heat stroke, you should immediately call an ambulance and perform first aid until the ambulance arrives.

Control measure	Example
Elimination	Cancelling work tasks or waiting for hot conditions to pass
Substitution	Arranging for the work to be done by a machine (eg a forklift) rather than performing the task manually
Isolation	Isolating hot machinery or surfaces by using shields, barriers, and guards
Engineering controls	Providing air-conditioned, shaded, or cool break areas, as close as possible to the work site
Administrative controls	Training on the importance of hydration and recognising the symptoms of heat-related illness
Personal protective equipment	Loose-fitting, lightweight, breathable clothing

Read the guidance for more information on how to manage the risks of working in the heat:

Government of South Australia

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[1] Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, "Heat stress" https://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/safety-and-prevention/hazards/hazardous-exposures/heatstress; Manal Azzi et al., eds., Heat at work: Implications for safety and health. A global review of the science, policy and practice (International Labour Organization, 2024), 5, 9.

[2] Heat stress (basic) calculator: https://onlineservices.oir.qld.gov.au/etools/views/calc/heatStress.xhtml.