

HEAT-RELATED ILLNESSES



Farmers and agricultural workers perform work in a wide range of environmental conditions. The severity of symptoms will vary, but knowing the warning signs of heat-related illness can save lives. Deaths attributed to natural heat exposure represent a continuing public health concern. Preparedness and response initiatives that limit exposure during periods of extreme heat can reduce mortality. During 2018–2020, a total of 3,066 heat-related deaths occurred. The highest percentage of heat-related deaths occurred among persons aged 55–64 years (19%).

Special populations within the agricultural community may have elevated risk for complications from the heat. Older workers may have more difficulty regulating body temperature. Young children sweat less and quickly produce more heat than adults. Farmworkers may be working far from water or shade, may be compensated in a way that discourages taking a break, and may be fearful of reporting any symptoms of heat-related illness to supervisors.

PREVENTION

To prevent heat-related illness and fatalities:

- Drink water every 15 minutes, even if you are not thirsty.
- Rest in the shade to cool down.
- Wear a hat and light-colored clothing.
- Learn the signs of heat illness and what to do in an emergency.
- Keep an eye on fellow workers.
- “Easy does it” on your first days of work in the heat. You need to get used to it.

(Source: OSHA’s Water. Rest. Shade. campaign)

Heat Index	Risk Level	Protective Measures
Less than 91° F	Lower (Caution)	Basic heat safety and planning
91°F to 103°F	Moderate	Implement precautions and heighten awareness
103°F to 115°F	High	Additional precautions to protect workers
Greater than 115°F	Very High to Extreme	Triggers even more aggressive protective measures

Resource: <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/heatillness/edresources.html>



Worker resting in the shade wearing sun safe clothing.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH HEAT-RELATED ILLNESS

- Outdoor temperature
- Length of sun exposure
- Dehydration
- Workloads and speed of work
- Age
- Preexisting health conditions
- Acclimatization (how new the person is to the heat and the job)