

## Workplace Health and Safety Queensland

## Dry cleaning and laundry industry - Heat stress

### What is heat stress?

Heat stress occurs when the body heats up faster than it can cool down. If a person gets too hot, they can experience mild symptoms such as an itchy, red skin rash through to severe symptoms such as heat stroke, which can be fatal.

### What causes overheating in a dry cleaner or laundry?

There are a number of factors in dry cleaners and laundries that can contribute to someone becoming overheated, including:

- heat generated inside the body by doing physically demanding work (e.g. lifting and carrying bags of laundry)
- heat from ironing equipment with exposed hot surfaces (e.g. roller irons, ironing presses)
- heat from large washers
- steam and moisture created by the washing process raising humidity, as humidity reduces the body's ability to cool down
- people wearing clothing or personal protective equipment (e.g. aprons) that doesn't allow the body to cool down
- environmental factors (e.g. high air temperature, lack of breeze).

### How can heat related stress be prevented?

The best way to prevent heat related stress is to reduce the sources of heat in the workplace. Some ways to do this include:

- making jobs less physically demanding by automating jobs or providing mechanical aids

(e.g. move laundry bags on trolleys or an overhead tracking system)

- reducing heat emissions from irons and washers through insulation or shielding
- improving ventilation or installing air-conditioning
- eliminating unnecessary escape of water/steam into the air (e.g. seal leaks from steam valves and pipes; minimise excess water on floor, which can evaporate and increase humidity).

If these are not possible, then modifying work schedules and other administrative changes can be made, including:

- limiting the amount of time people have to spend in hot or humid areas
- scheduling breaks in cool areas where people can take off personal protective equipment
- separating hot processes or machines from the rest of the workplace
- scheduling hot jobs for cooler parts of the day
- developing procedures for the treatment of people suffering from heat stress
- training people to recognise the signs of heat stress and the steps they should take to prevent it

People should also be encouraged to drink plenty of fluids, as most heat illnesses are caused by dehydration. In hot conditions, or when doing heavy work, people can sweat out about a litre an hour. It is recommended that people drink 150-200 millilitres of cool fluid (preferably water) every 15-20 minutes.

Thirst shouldn't be relied on as an indication of when to have a drink, as by the time

someone feels thirsty, they are already partly dehydrated.

For more information on heat stress and general obligations workplace health and safety issues call 1300 369 915 or visit [www.worksafe.qld.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au)

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