

New & Young Workers Suffer the Most in the Heat, Says Study



Yes, the summer is winding up. But it's not uncommon for the hot and humid weather to linger into September and the beginning of the fall. So you can't drop your guard when it comes to protecting workers' especially new ones' from heat stress just yet.

A new study by researchers at the Institute for Work & Health (IWH) on work-related heat stress found that heat strokes, sun strokes and other heat illnesses disproportionately affect those on the job less than two months.

The study's main objective was to paint a portrait of work-related heat stress in Ontario, including how often it happens, who faces the most risk and when cases happen most frequently.

In the seven years covered by the study, emergency rooms in Ontario treated 785 cases of heat illnesses incurred at work and workers filed 612 lost-time claims for heat illnesses.

According to the study, young men working in manual occupations are most vulnerable to extreme heat. And the more inexperienced they are, the more likely they are to need time off of work to recover from heat stroke, sun stroke, fainting and other types of heat illnesses.

Of course, this segment of the workforce'young, manual labourers new to the job'is already at greater risk of work injury overall.

For example, manual workers accounted for 52% of all lost-time claims in general, but 59% of all heat-related lost-time claims.

In addition, workers who were on the job for less than one month accounted for 4.2% of all lost-time claims'but their heat-related illnesses accounted for nearly twice that proportion (8.2% of all heat-related lost-time claims). And workers on the job from one to two months accounted for 9% of all heat-related

claims.

The researchers explained that these findings support the importance of workers getting acclimatized to their work environment. (For more on the importance of acclimatization, watch this recorded webinar on protecting workers from heat stress.)

One notable finding in the study was the fact that heat-related illnesses tended to occur in clusters. For example, one particularly hot spell over two days in August 2006 accounted for 101 instances'or 13%'of all heat-related ER visits in the seven years.

For tools, information and other resources on protecting all of your workers from heat-related illnesses, go to the OHS Insider's Heat Stress Compliance Centre.