

# Working safely outdoors in warm weather

Hot summer months pose special hazards for outdoor workers who must protect themselves against heat, sun exposure, and other hazards. Employers and employees should know the potential hazards in their workplaces and how to manage them.

## Sun

Sunlight contains ultraviolet (UV) radiation, which causes premature aging of the skin, wrinkles, cataracts, and skin cancer. There are no safe UV rays or safe suntans. Be especially careful in the sun if you burn easily, if you spend a lot of time outdoors, or if you have any of the following physical features: numerous, irregular, or large moles; freckles; fair skin; or blond, red, or light-brown hair. Here's how to block those harmful rays:

- Cover up. Wear loose-fitting, long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Use sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30. Be sure to follow application directions on the bottle or tube.
- Wear a hat. A wide-brim hat, not a baseball cap, works best because it protects the neck, ears, eyes, forehead, nose, and scalp.
- Wear UV-absorbent sunglasses (eye protection). Sunglasses don't have to be expensive, but they should block 99 percent to 100 percent of UV-A and UV-B radiation. Before you buy sunglasses, read the product tag or label.
- Limit exposure. UV rays are most intense between 10 AM and 4 PM.

## Heat

The combination of heat and humidity can be a serious health threat during the summer months. So, take precautions. Here's how:

- Drink small amounts of water frequently.
- Wear light-colored, loose-fitting, breathable clothing; cotton is good.
- Take frequent short breaks in cool shade.
- Eat smaller meals before work activity. Avoid caffeine and alcohol or large amounts of sugar.
- Work in the shade.
- Find out from your health-care provider if your medications and the heat don't mix.
- Know that equipment, such as respirators or work suits, can increase heat stress.

## Lyme Disease/Tick-Borne Diseases

These illnesses (i.e. *Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever*) are transmitted to people by bacteria from the bites of infected deer (blacklegged) ticks. In the case of Lyme disease, most, but not all, victims will develop a "bulls-eye" rash. Other signs and symptoms may be non-specific and similar to flu-like symptoms such as fever, lymph node swelling, neck stiffness, generalized fatigue, headaches, migrating joint aches, or muscle aches. Protect yourself with these precautions:

- Wear light-colored clothes to see ticks more easily. Wear long sleeves and tuck pant legs into socks or boots.
- Wear high boots or closed shoes that cover your feet completely.
- Wear a hat.
- Use tick repellants, but not on your face.
- Shower after work. Wash and dry your work clothes at high temperature.
- Examine your body for ticks after work.
- Remove any attached ticks promptly and carefully with fine-tipped tweezers by gripping the tick. Do not use petroleum jelly, a hot match, or nail polish to remove the tick.

## West Nile Virus

West Nile virus is transmitted by the bite of an infected mosquito. Mild symptoms include fever, headache, and body aches, occasionally with a skin rash on the trunk of the body and swollen lymph glands. Symptoms of severe infection include headache, high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness, and paralysis. You can protect yourself from mosquito bites in these ways:

- Apply *Picaridin* or insect repellent with DEET to exposed skin.
- Spray clothing with repellents containing DEET or *permethrin*. (Note: Do not spray *permethrin* directly onto exposed skin.). Wear long sleeves, long pants, and socks.
- Be extra vigilant at dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active.
- Get rid of sources of standing water, such as used tires and buckets, to reduce or eliminate mosquito breeding areas.

Source: OSHA Fact Sheet Working Outdoors in Warm Climates



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