

Heat-related illness¹

Fact sheet

During extremely hot weather, it is easy to become dehydrated or overheat. If this happens you may develop a heat-related illness such as heat cramps, heat exhaustion or even heat stroke. If you suffer from a chronic health condition, it may become worse during hot weather. So, it is important for you to plan ahead to stay healthy in hot weather.

What happens to your body in extreme heat?

When the weather is very hot, your body has to work harder and produce more sweat to keep cool. Under some conditions, sweating just isn't enough and your body temperature can rise rapidly. This is more likely to happen when it is humid, or when you are dehydrated and can't produce enough sweat. It's important that your body temperature stays between 36.1–37.8°C. If your temperature rises above this, you may develop signs of heat-related illness.

Who is at risk?

All Queenslanders are at risk during periods of hot or prolonged high temperatures. However, some people are at a higher risk of harm, such as

- the elderly—especially those who live alone
- babies and very young children—as they produce more body heat, sweat less and their body temperature can rise more rapidly
- pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers
- people who suffer from a pre-existing medical condition—such as diabetes, kidney disease or mental illness
- people who take certain medication—such as allergy medicines (antihistamines), blood pressure and heart medications (beta-blockers).
- fluid tablets (diuretics) and anti-depressant or anti-psychotic medications. If you take this medication, consult with your doctor or pharmacist for more information.
- people with an alcohol or other drug problem
- people with mobility problems or disability who may not be able to identify or communicate their discomfort or thirst
- people who are physically active—such as manual workers and people who play sport.



Figure 1 Heat haze

The best way to reduce the risk of heat-related illness is to drink plenty of water and keep your body as cool as possible.

Common symptoms and First Aid for heat-related illness

The chart below lists the most common symptoms and First Aid for heat-related illness that can affect people. Please note that the presence of symptoms may vary from person to person.

¹ 2013 NSW Health Environmental Health, *Heat-Related Illnesses Including Heat Stroke*, at <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/factsheets/Pages/heat-related-illness.aspx>

Heat-related illness	Symptoms	First Aid
Dehydration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> dizziness tiredness irritability thirst bright or dark urine loss of appetite fainting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> drink plenty of water or alternate with diluted fruit juice (1 part juice in 4 part water) avoid alcohol and drinks high in caffeine and sugar move to a cool place, lie down and remove excess clothing seek medical help if start to feel unwell
Heat Cramps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> profuse sweating painful muscle cramps usually in legs and abdominal muscles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> stop activity and sit quietly in a cool place increase fluid intake rest a few hours before returning to activity stretch and gently massage affected muscles seek medical help if cramps persist
Heat Exhaustion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> pale complexion and profuse sweating fatigue, weakness and restlessness headache, dizziness nausea, vomiting weak rapid heart rate breathing fast and shallow muscle cramps, weakness fainting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> move to a cool place, lie down and remove excess clothing. To cool down the body try <ul style="list-style-type: none"> cool shower, bath or sponge bath place moist, cool cloths on forehead, wrists, sides of neck, underarms and groin area, fan continuously give small sips of cool water or diluted fruit juice or cordial (1 part juice in 4 parts water) if recovery is not prompt or vomiting occurs, seek emergency medical assistance
Heat stroke	<p>More severe and dangerous form of heat-related illness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> confusion, poor coordination or slurred speech hot, dry skin, possibly not sweating fast and shallow breaths rapid pulse extreme fatigue, headache fainting vomiting and diarrhoea loss of consciousness 	<p>This is a medical emergency—call triple zero (000), then</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> check person's airway, breathing and pulse – if unconscious position on their side and commence CPR if required. seek urgent medical advice if ambulance delayed if possible, move person to a cool place, lie them down and remove excess clothing. to cool the body place moist, cool cloths on forehead, wrists, sides of neck, underarms and groin area, fan continuously give small sips of fluids if conscious and able to swallow do not give any medications unless they are prescribed by the doctor

Further information

- Contact your doctor, hospital or health clinic
- In an emergency, ring 000 for urgent advice from the Queensland Ambulance Service
- Call 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84) at any time
- Contact 13 QGOV (13 74 68) for your nearest public health unit.