

Heat Illness: New and Returning Workers

Todd Jerome Jenkins | v1.0 | October 12, 2026 | Discussion + field verification

Why this matters

Experience in the trade does not prove readiness for today's heat. New assignments, time away, heavier work and protective clothing can change the exposure.

Objective: Verify the individual heat-exposure progression and usable recovery arrangements.

Key hazards or failure points

Full workload too soon; lost heat tolerance; hotter conditions; heavier PPE; unavailable relief; symptoms hidden by production pressure.

Practical controls

- Use the employer's heat plan to stage exposure for new and returning workers, considering the task, conditions and applicable requirements.
- Provide usable water, cooling and recovery time, with staffing that allows workers to take the planned breaks.
- Assign close observation and a buddy arrangement. Make symptom reporting immediate and supported; keep personal medical information private.

Verify It in the Field

Supervisor confirms today's exposure stage, planned duration and recovery arrangements before assigning the task; do not infer readiness from appearance.

Locate water and cooling, verify access and confirm who provides relief when a worker needs to stop.

Ask workers to explain how to report symptoms and get help. Confirm communication, responder access and who stays with an ill person.

Stop and reassess

Stop for symptoms or unavailable controls. Confusion, slurred speech, seizures or unconsciousness: call 911 immediately, begin cooling and stay with the person. Do not wait for dry skin. Reassess changed workload or weather.

Ask the crew

1. What makes today different for this worker?
2. Who provides relief for recovery?
3. What happens immediately if someone feels unwell?

Use this HOP tool — Turnover: Choose a worker reassignment without discussing medical details. The outgoing lead describes today's heat-exposure stage, recovery and observation arrangements. The receiving lead explains what will continue and identifies any missing relief or cooling. Resolve the gap before transferring the task.

Sources: OSHA: Protecting New Workers; Heat Illness First Aid; NIOSH Workplace Recommendations; DOE Vol. 2, pp. 52–53. HOP concepts adapted from DOE-HDBK-1028-2009, Vol. 2 (June 2009). No claim to original U.S. Government work; no government endorsement implied.

Free next step: JHA/JSA planning and field-verification worksheet

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/heat-acclimatization-new-returning-workers