



HEAT INJURY PREVENTION GUIDE

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Heat injuries, also known as heat-related illnesses, can occur in youth sports when athletes are exposed to high temperatures and engage in physical activity without proper hydration, nutrition, and acclimatization. These injuries can range from mild heat cramps to severe conditions like heat exhaustion and heat stroke. Here are common signs of heat injuries in youth sports.

Signs and Symptoms of Heat Injury

1. Heat Cramps:

- ☐ Muscle cramps and spasms, typically in the legs, arms, or abdomen.
- ☐ Sweating excessively during exercise.
- ☐ Thirst and dehydration.

2. Heat Exhaustion:

- ☐ Profuse sweating and cool, clammy skin.
- ☐ Fatigue, weakness, and dizziness.
- ☐ Nausea or vomiting.
- ☐ Rapid pulse and shallow breathing.
- ☐ Confusion or irritability.
- ☐ Headache.

3. Heat Stroke (a medical emergency):

- ☐ High body temperature (above 104°F or 40°C).
- ☐ No sweating (dry, hot skin).
- ☐ Rapid heart rate and breathing.
- ☐ Severe headache.
- ☐ Confusion, agitation, or loss of consciousness.
- ☐ Seizures or coma.

Coaches, parents, and athletes need to be aware of these signs and take immediate action if any heat injury is suspected. Heat injuries can be prevented by staying hydrated, acclimatization, avoiding prolonged exposure during the hottest parts of the day (noon to 3pm), providing shaded areas, take frequent breaks, and having a heat safety plan in place for sports activities during hot weather. Ultimately, the goal is to ensure the safety and well-being of young athletes during physical activity in hot weather. Here are some key strategies to help prevent heat injuries:



Heat Injury Prevention

1. Hydration:

- ☐ Encourage athletes to start hydrating well before practice or games.
- ☐ Provide access to water during breaks and ensure players take regular water breaks.
- ☐ Educate athletes on the importance of drinking fluids, even if they do not feel thirsty. (see Nutrition Guide)

2. Pre-Activity Nutrition:

- ☐ Encourage athletes to eat a balanced meal or snack before practice or games to provide energy and maintain electrolyte balance. (see Nutrition Guide)

3. Acclimatization:

- ☐ Gradually introduce athletes to hot weather conditions to help their bodies adapt.
- ☐ Start with shorter, less intense practices in the heat and progressively increase the duration and intensity.

4. Proper Clothing:

- ☐ Dress athletes in lightweight, moisture-wicking, and light-colored clothing that helps dissipate heat and sweat.
- ☐ Ensure players wear appropriate hats, sunglasses, and sunscreen for sun protection.

5. Scheduled Breaks:

- ☐ Incorporate frequent breaks during practice or games, allowing athletes to cool down and rehydrate.
- ☐ Encourage athletes to rest in shaded areas during breaks.

6. Education:

- ☐ Educate athletes, coaches, and parents about the signs of heat-related illnesses, such as heat exhaustion and heatstroke.
- ☐ Teach athletes to recognize symptoms like dizziness, nausea, excessive sweating, or confusion and to report them immediately.

7. Cooling Measures:

- ☐ Implement cooling strategies, such as having wet towels, misting fans, or ice packs, to help athletes cool down during breaks.
- ☐ Designate shaded areas for cooling off.

8. Limit Intense Activities:

- ☐ Avoid or limit strenuous activities during the hottest parts of the day, if possible.
- ☐ Schedule practices and games during cooler times, such as early morning or late afternoon.



9. Monitoring:

- ☐ Continuously monitor athletes for signs of heat-related distress.
- ☐ Ensure coaches and parents are trained in recognizing and responding to heat injuries.

10. Parent Communication:

- ☐ Keep parents informed about the team's heat-related safety measures and encourage them to communicate any concerns or issues.

Heat Injury Treatment

1. Recognize the Signs:

- ☐ Be aware of the symptoms of heat-related illnesses, including excessive sweating, rapid heartbeat, dizziness, nausea, confusion, and loss of consciousness in severe cases.

2. Move to a Cooler Area:

- ☐ Immediately move the athlete to a shaded or air-conditioned area to lower their body temperature.

3. Hydration:

- ☐ Encourage the athlete to drink fluids, preferably water or a sports drink with electrolytes, in small sips.
- ☐ If you think your athlete is suffering from a Heat Stroke, DO NOT encourage them to drink water/fluids. Consuming fluids on an empty stomach may cause severe stomach cramps thus worsening the situation. Seek medical attention immediately.

4. Remove Excess Clothing:

- ☐ Help the athlete remove excess clothing to facilitate cooling.

5. Cooling Measures:

- ☐ Apply cool, wet cloths or ice packs to the athlete's forehead, neck, armpits, and groin to help lower their body temperature. Submerging the forearms in an ice cooler may rapidly drop core temperature.
- ☐ Use fans or create airflow to enhance cooling.

6. Rehydrate and Rest:

- ☐ Continue offering fluids and ensure the athlete rests until their body temperature returns to normal.

7. Medical Evaluation:

- ☐ If the athlete's condition does not improve within 15 minutes or worsens, seek immediate medical attention.



Heatstroke: Medical Emergency

1. Call 911:

- ☐ If you suspect heatstroke, call for emergency medical assistance immediately.

2. Cool the Body Rapidly:

- ☐ DO NOT force or encourage your athlete to drink water/fluids if heat stroke is suspected. Consuming fluids on an empty stomach may cause severe stomach cramps thus worsening the situation.
- ☐ Loosen or remove non-essential clothing items to allow heat to dissipate.
- ☐ Immerse the athlete in cold water (ice cooler in the dugout) or use ice packs on the body's major heat-absorbing areas (neck, back, forearms and groin).
- ☐ Continue cooling efforts until the athlete's body temperature falls to around 102°F (39°C). This can be measured by touch (normal "I think you have a fever" feeling). Allow the body to regulate back to a normal temperature from 102°F (39°C) to 98.6°F (37°C) naturally.

3. Monitoring and Support:

- ☐ While awaiting medical assistance, monitor the athlete's vital signs and consciousness level.
- ☐ Keep them in a cooled area and continue efforts to lower their body temperature.

Preventing heat-related injuries is crucial. Ensure that young athletes are consuming proper nutrition and are adequately hydrated before, during, and after practices and games. Schedule practices during cooler times of the day and provide regular breaks for rest and hydration. Educate coaches, parents, and athletes about the signs and risks of heat-related illnesses to promote a safe and enjoyable sports experience for youth athletes.