



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
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ADVISORY

To: Farm Labor Camp Operators
From: Steven Hughes, Director, Community Sanitation Program (CSP), Bureau of Climate and Environmental Health
Date: June 12, 2024
Re: Extreme Heat-Related Illness and Preventative Measures for Farm Labor Camps

Farm workers can be exposed to extreme temperatures in the summer months. As climate change increases the frequency of elevated heat, humidity and drought conditions, outdoor work environments place individuals at greater risk of heat-related illness (e.g., heat cramps, heat exhaustion, heat stroke). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued [guidance on preventing heat-related illness](#) to protect individuals through prevention, identification, and treatment. The Massachusetts Department of Public Health's Bureau of Climate and Environmental Health (BCEH) offers operators this advisory to review, implement, and share extreme heat preventative measures with their supervisors and employees.

The first step to mitigating risk is preparation. The CDC, in partnership with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Weather Service (NWS), has developed a [HeatRisk Dashboard](#) to provide a nationwide seven-day heat forecast model. This tool enables users to search by zip code, identify when air temperatures may reach levels that could negatively impact their health, and provides recommendations on actions to be taken to safeguard their health during extreme heat events. This summer CSP will use this tool periodically to alert operators of predicted heat waves and to remind operators of regulatory requirements and best practices. CSP also encourages operators to use the tool for themselves to plan for major and extreme heat events.

The two most important tools to protect against heat-related illness are to maintain a low core body temperature and to stay hydrated. Regulation *105 CMR 420.000: Housing and Sanitation Standards for Farm Labor Camps (State Sanitary Code Chapter III)*, sets forth provisions intended to protect the health, safety, and well-being of farm labor camp occupants. These requirements, followed by additional best practices, provide an opportunity for operators to safeguard their workers from heat-related illness:

420.450: Quantity and Quality of Water: The operator shall supply a safe potable water supply sufficient in quantity and pressure to meet the needs of the occupants. The water supply shall be obtained only from a public water supply, if available, or some other source approved by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.

and

420.456: Water for Shed and Field Workers: Where running water from an approved source is not available, the operator shall make drinking water in covered containers readily available to both shed and field workers. Water containers shall be disinfected at the start of each season and whenever else necessary and shall be maintained in a clean and sanitary condition. The filling hole plug shall be kept securely in place except during filling time.

- Educate workers on the importance of hydration with easy-to-understand factsheets, in English and Spanish, posted near drinking water sources:
 - [Heat Stress: Hydration \(cdc.gov\)](#);
 - [Estrés por calor: Hidratación \(cdc.gov\)](#);
- Provide re-usable water bottles to stay hydrated;
- Provide ice as needed;
- Provide frequent breaks for workers throughout the day, and increase frequency of breaks with higher temperatures;
- Light-colored and loose-fitting clothing should be worn, to help reflect heat and promote airflow;
- Sunscreen, hats, or light scarfs should be worn to protect the head, neck, and face from sun exposure;
- Identify priority locations in the shade or cooler areas particularly for heat sensitive, at-risk, or new farm workers who may be [less acclimated](#) to extreme heat conditions;
- Provide artificial shaded areas with canopies or tents when natural shade is not available.
- Avoid the hottest part of the day, whenever possible, work earlier and later during the coolest times;
- Train workers and staff on the high-risk factors as well as how to monitor and recognize the signs and symptoms of heat-related illness:
 - High risk factors include old age, obesity, hypertension, asthma, mental illness, and medication use;
- Implement a buddy system to monitor co-workers for early signs and symptoms of heat-related illness, prioritizing workers that may have high risk factors;
- Use fans or air conditioning in working and living areas;
- Ensure windows that get late morning and/or afternoon sun are covered or tinted; and
- Identify and provide priority housing (in cooler areas) for heat sensitive, at-risk, or new workers who may not be acclimated to extreme heat conditions.

Local government authorities and community organizations may set up cooling centers at strategic locations near your farming areas. Cooling centers are designated facilities equipped with air conditioning and other amenities to provide respite from the sweltering heat during peak hours. These centers are particularly important for those engaged in physically demanding activities, such as farm work, as they help prevent heat-related illnesses. Check local town websites or call your local authorities to determine which cooling centers are near you. You may also call [2-1-1](#) for assistance.

Listed below are further details on the signs and symptoms of the different types of heat-related illness, and what you should do if you see someone in distress from the heat. When in doubt, call 911 or emergency medical services.

Additional information is available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/warning.html>

Signs of Heat Cramps	You Should	Go to the Hospital if:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavy sweating • Muscle pain or spasms (often in the abdomen, arms, or calves) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Give them water, clear juice, or a sports drink</i> • Tell them to stop exerting themselves and/or stop physical activity and move to a cool place • Have them wait for cramps to go away before doing any more physical activity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The person has a history of heart problems • Cramps last longer than 1 hour • The person is on a low sodium diet
Signs of Heat Exhaustion	You Should:	Go to the Hospital if:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lots of sweating • Fast/weak pulse • Nausea/vomiting • Headache/dizziness • Fainting (passing out) • Muscle cramps • Cold, pale, and clammy skin • Fatigue/tiredness/or weakness • Irritability • Thirst • Decreased urine output 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Give them water</i> • Move them to a cool place • Allow them to lie down • Loosen their clothes or change into lightweight clothing • Apply cool wet towels or cloths on the person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The person is throwing up • The person is getting worse • Symptoms last longer than 1 hour • The person has heart problems or high blood pressure
Signs of Heat Stroke	You Should:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fast, strong pulse • High body temperature (above 103°F) • Confusion • Dizziness • Red, hot, dry, or damp skin • Throbbing headache • Nausea • Losing consciousness (passing out) • Altered mental state • Unconsciousness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CALL 911 – this is a medical emergency. • Reduce the person’s body temperature with whatever means you can - apply cool wet towels or cloths on the person, immerse them in a cool bath/shower, or spray them with cool hose water • Move them to a cool place • Wait until clearance from a medical professional BEFORE you give them anything to drink • If there is uncontrollable muscle twitching, keep the person safe, but do not place any objects in their mouth • If there is vomiting, turn the person on their side to keep the airway open 	

The Department of Public Health’s Community Sanitation Program recommends this information be shared with staff and all farm workers. As always, thank you for your cooperation and assistance with this important public health matter.