



First aid fact sheet

Heat-induced illness

(previously called heat exhaustion and heat stroke)



- A heat-induced illness can quickly become life-threatening.
- If the patient does not improve quickly (within 10 minutes), send for an ambulance. Call Triple Zero (000).
- First aid for a heat-induced illness is cooling and rehydration.

Signs

The patient may be hot, sweaty and breathless. Or they may be hot and dry by the time they are seen.

Gradual signs of a worsening condition may include:

- not able to continue the activity—feeling hot, exhausted and weak
- high body temperature
- dizziness and faintness
- nausea, vomiting or diarrhoea
- pale skin and other signs of shock
- rapid weak pulse
- poor muscle control or weakness, or unsteady gait
- decreasing levels of consciousness, confusion, or seizures.

If the patient is not sweating, this is a sign of serious illness.

Carbohydrate electrolyte fluids (any commercially available 'sports drink') can be an alternative to water for the management of exertion-related dehydration. As a guiding principle, oral rehydration should be guided by the patient's thirst. However, if the patient is suffering heat-induced illness and are dehydrated, they may not feel thirsty.

What to do

- 1 Follow DRSABCD.
- 2 Lie the patient down in a cool or shaded area.
- 3 **Strip** the patient of as much clothing as possible.

If the patient does not improve quickly (within 10 minutes), call Triple Zero (000) for an ambulance.

- 4 **Soak** the patient with any available water.
- 5 **Fan** the patient continuously.
- 6 Give cold water to the patient to drink if they are fully conscious and able to swallow.

If practicable, immersion in a bath of cold water is the most effective cooling means possible.

For the patient over 5 years

- 1 Immerse the patient (whole-body from the neck down) in a bath of cold water (preferably 1–7°) for 15 minutes.
- 2 Continuously observe the patient to ensure an open airway in case of any change in their level of consciousness.

If cold bath is not available, use a combination of the following as available:

- 1 Wet the patient with cool or cold water under a shower or with a hose or other source of running water.
- 2 Apply cold packs to the neck, groin, armpits, facial cheeks, palms of hands, soles of feet.
- 3 Repeatedly wet the skin with a wet cloth or spray bottle.
- 4 Fan continuously.

For the patient under 5 years

- 1 Place the patient in a bath of lukewarm water (if available) and sponge frequently.

If cold bath is not available, use a combination of the following as available:

- 1 Wet the patient with cool or cold water under a shower or with a hose or other source of running water.
- 2 Repeatedly wet the skin with a wet cloth or spray bottle.
- 3 Fan continuously.

In an emergency call Triple Zero (000)

DRSABCD Danger ▶ Response ▶ Send for help ▶ Airway ▶ Breathing ▶ CPR ▶ Defibrillation

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