

Planning and Responding to a Heat or Mental Health Emergency in the Workplace



2026 Joint Georgia Struck-By and Georgia Mental Health Alliances Stand Down: Score Goals at Work by Cooling Down Your Mind and Body!

1. Explain Why it Matters

Knowing how to respond to a heat or mental health emergency saves lives. Recognizing heat or mental health emergencies, planning how to respond when emergencies occur, and training everyone on those plans can reduce the severity of heat-related illnesses or mental health-related crises. Everyone at work should learn how to respond to a heat or mental health emergency because:

- Quick action during a heat or mental health emergency saves lives.
- Practice helps workers know what actions to take and reduces panic during an emergency

2. Tell Workers What They Need to Know

- Know the signs and symptoms of heat emergencies - these include high body temperature, slurred speech, abnormal behavior, seizures, and loss of consciousness (i.e., fainting, collapse). Other symptoms may include staggering, vomiting, acting irrationally or disoriented, having convulsions, and having an elevated heart rate even after resting.
- Know the signs and symptoms of mental health emergencies - these include inability to perform daily tasks related to their work, rapid mood swings, increased energy level, inability to stay still, pacing, suddenly depressed, withdrawn, suddenly happy or calm after a period of depression, increased agitation, verbal threats, violent or out-of-control behavior, destruction of property. Other warning signs may include abusive behavior to self or others, including substance misuse or self-harm (cutting), isolation from work and usual socialization, seeming out of touch with reality (psychosis) – unable to recognize colleagues, confused, has strange ideas, thinks they're someone they're not, doesn't understand what people are saying, hears voices, sees things that aren't there. Paranoia with irrational and persistent feelings of distrust and suspicion.
- Know how to get help and who to call. How would you contact your supervisor or emergency medical services? What do you do if you don't have a phone or cellular service?
- Know what to do when someone is experiencing a heat or mental health emergency – time is of the essence!
 - Call 911 for a heat emergency or for a mental health emergency if the person is in immediate danger of hurting themselves or others.
 - If the person is not in immediate danger of hurting themselves or others, call 988 for guidance from the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline on helping the person through their mental health crisis. If you can do so without leaving the person alone, task a trusted colleague with calling your company's crisis response team or HR. The crisis counselors at 988 will help

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manage the following steps: De-escalation techniques; Provide comfort and support; Waiting for help; and What to do when help arrives.

- In a heat emergency do the following: move the affected person to a shaded/cool area, cool affected person with cold water or ice, provide the affected person water (if conscious), and monitor the affected person and ensure they are not left alone.
- Know how to direct emergency responders to your work location. Some work locations are difficult for emergency services to find. When every minute counts, be ready to give detailed directions. What do you do if the affected person is in a place that's hard to reach for emergency responders?
- Know that we often push ourselves and it may be hard to recognize when to take a break to prevent a heat or mental health emergency. Look out for the signs and symptoms that something is wrong in your body (or mind) and your coworkers.

3. What can we do?

- Encourage each other to hydrate throughout the day. Check your urine color when you use the bathroom to help you gauge your hydration levels. Darker urine color could indicate that you may need to drink more water.
- Take rest breaks in a shaded or cooled area – these are vital to your safety. You can protect yourself and your coworkers by following rest break schedules. Remember to take off any Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) or heavy clothing when resting to help cool off.
- Follow the buddy system. Observe each other for any signs and symptoms when working in the heat. NEVER leave someone alone if they do not feel well.
- Understand personal factors (e.g., age, medications, prior conditions, level of physical activity, other behaviors) that can affect people's response to heat. If you are new or returning to work from leave, you may need time to get used to working in the heat.
- If you don't feel well, or notice a coworker doesn't feel well, speak up. Do not try to power through the work.
- Wear lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing when possible.
- During a mental health emergency provide comfort and support by doing the following:
 - Stay with the person experiencing a crisis.
 - Ask directly if the person is considering suicide. Example: "Are you thinking about suicide or self-harm?"
 - Remove potential weapons or move to a space free from potential means.
 - Listen, express concern, reassure. Focus on being understanding, caring, and nonjudgmental. Example: "You are not alone. I'm here for you." Example: "I may not be able to understand exactly how you feel, but I care about you and want to help."
 - Do not: Promise secrecy. Say instead: "I care about you too much to keep this kind of secret. You need help, and I'm here to help you get it."

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- Do not: Debate the value of living or argue that suicide is right or wrong.
- Do not: Minimize or disregard what the person is going through. Example: “You don’t have it that bad. Just snap out of it.”
- Do not: Argue with or confront a colleague about their beliefs or behaviors, as their experiences feel real to them.
- Do not: Whisper, joke, or laugh, which may increase agitation and/or trigger paranoia.
- Stay calm and be an ally. Example: “That must be frightening. I would feel scared, too, if that was happening to me.”
- Communicate thoughtfully and ask one-part questions. Example: “Would you like to sit at the table with me?”

4. Let’s Talk About It – Quick Conversations Lock in Knowledge

- What are the signs and symptoms of a heat or mental health emergency?
- What contributes to a higher risk of heat or mental health emergencies?
- What steps should you take if you see or suspect a heat or mental health emergency?

Tip: Be sure to encourage workers to speak up when they see a dangerous situation. Ensure they know that by speaking up they are helping to create a safe workplace for all.

5. How to Report a Concern

Remind workers who to contact at the job site or your company if there’s a safety problem that needs fixing.

References

- Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA): [Plan and Respond to a Heat Emergency](#)
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): [Navigating-a-Mental-Health-Crisis-at-Work-1.pdf](#)