

Summertime safety: Know the signs of heat stroke

A UK P&I Club Member recently reported the death of two crew members. The crew were found unresponsive onboard, apparently suffering from heat stroke. Sadly, particularly at this time of year, this is not an isolated incident.



When the temperature rises, it's important to be vigilant about the dangers of heat exhaustion and heat stroke by maintaining safe working practices onboard in hot countries and hot temperatures.

Heat stroke, also called sun stroke, is a type of severe heat illness that results in a body temperature greater than 40°C (104°F). Heat stroke regularly occurs as a development from milder heat-related illnesses such as heat cramps, heat syncope (fainting) and heat exhaustion. Worryingly, heat stroke can also strike with no previous signs of heat injury.

Symptoms can include confusion and disorientation as well as red, dry or damp skin, headache and dizziness. Additionally, increased thirst, shallow

breathing and a body temperature over 40°C (104°F) can be a cause for concern. Onset can be sudden or gradual, and complications may include respiratory problems, seizures and kidney failure.

Perspiration is the body's best heat-control mechanism but the salt and water that is lost must be replaced. The salt is best taken with food and supplemented by drinks containing salt to prevent heat cramp.

Seafarers must take care when working in hot temperatures, on deck in the sun, or in engine rooms and other confined spaces. In very hot conditions, as well as drinking plenty of water, seafarers ought to wear protective clothing that ensures the free circulation of air to allow evaporation of sweat.

What to do when heat stroke strikes

- Move to a cool, shady or air-conditioned place and remove any unnecessary clothing.
- Lie down and raise their feet slightly.
- Wrap the patient in a cold wet sheet until their temperature falls to at least 38°C (100.4°F). Measure this with a thermometer under their tongue or under their armpit.
- If no sheet is available, use a fan or sponge with cold water to keep the patient cool.
- Use ice packs and apply to the patient's armpits, neck and back. Because these areas are rich with blood vessels close to the skin, cooling them may reduce body temperature.
- Once their temperature seems to have gone back to normal, replace the wet sheet with a dry sheet.
- While waiting for help to arrive, keep checking the patient's temperature, as well as breathing, pulse and level of response.
- Repeat the cooling process to lower their temperature to normal levels.
- If loss of responsiveness occurs, open airway, check breathing and prepare to treat someone who has become unresponsive.

CREW HEALTH PROGRAMME

The Club was the first to launch a crew health scheme in 1996 due to increasing crew illness claims and a lack of accountability of clinics. Since 1996, the Crew Health programme has become one of the Club's leading loss prevention initiatives. The aim of the programme is to reduce the volume and value of crew illness claims which are caused by a pre-existing illnesses or disease. These underlying conditions often impact on the crew member's fitness for service and can endanger not only the health of the seafarer but also the onboard safety of other crew.

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Sophia joined Thomas Miller in 1992 and from 1994 worked as a claims handler dealing mainly with French and Spanish Members. In 2004, Sophia became the Crew Health Programme Director. Sophia has undertaken a large number of clinic audits, implemented the standard medical form and clinic guidelines. She has also lead the scheme through the largest period of growth and development with a doubling of approved clinic facilities and a four fold member increase. Sophia is a Director of Thomas Miller & Co. Ltd.

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Saidul Alom joined Crew Health from the European Region Service Team in 2004. Saidul provides administrative support to the Crew Health programme and is responsible for liaison with the approved clinics on financial billing matters and ensuring prompt payment of all clinic fees

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Stuart joined Thomas Miller in 1998 as a claims trainee for UK P&I Club's Greek Members. In April 2005 Stuart joined Crew Health as the Team Administrator. Stuart is responsible for co-ordination of Member entries and administration for the clinic approval process.