

## RISK SERVICES

# EMPLOYEE SAFETY UPDATE

## KEY STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE BETTER MENTAL HEALTH



Ask yourself what you can do now to improve your mental health and well-being in the workplace for you and others. Fostering a supportive workplace benefits everyone and contributes to overall productivity and success.

- 1. Train managers:** Equip managers with the skills to support employees' health and well-being. Give them the tools necessary to [foster a positive work environment](#), recognize signs of stress and encourage open communication.
- 2. Flexible work options:** Increase flexibility by allowing employees to choose where, when and how they work. Remote work, flexible hours and job-sharing can reduce stress and improve work-life balance.
- 3. Review health insurance policies:** Ensure robust mental health coverage in health insurance policies. Access to therapy, counseling and mental wellness programs is essential.
- 4. Listen and evolve:** Regularly seek feedback from employees. Use their insights to adapt workplace practices, policies and culture to better support mental health.
- 5. Equity, diversity and inclusion:** Evaluate organizational policies through a lens of equity, diversity and inclusion. Addressing systemic issues can positively impact mental health for all employees.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is a great source of information to assist you to be better informed and proactive in mental health. [A recent published blog](#) discusses our healthcare workers and what they face every day. While healthcare workers make up 10% of the workforce, they experience 48% of the nonfatal injuries due to workplace violence.

# Workplace violence: Active shooter

Active shooter events are unpredictable, can escalate quickly and are often over in less than 15 minutes. Your best chance for survival is to know what to do until help arrives. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) recommends the “Run, hide, fight” method to stay safe during an active shooter situation.

**Run.** Your best option is to escape to safety. If you can safely evacuate the area where an active shooter event is occurring, do so quickly and calmly. When you’ve reached a safe place, call 911.

**Hide.** If it isn’t possible to evacuate, the next-best option is to find a safe place to hide. A room with a lockable door is usually the best option. Lock the door and block it with heavy furniture. If there’s no such room available, consider hiding in a closet or behind a large object that offers concealment and protection. Silence your cellphone and any other possible sources of noise. Turn off the lights and remain quiet. Don’t leave your hiding place until you’re sure it’s safe to do so. If you can access a phone, dial 911 to inform police of the active shooter’s location. If you can’t speak, leave the line open and allow the dispatcher to listen to the situation.

**Fight.** If you can’t escape or hide, remain calm. As a last resort, if your life is in immediate danger, take action and try to disable the active shooter by throwing items, improvising weapons, yelling and acting as aggressively as possible.

When law enforcement arrives, cooperate with any instructions they give. Remain calm, avoid sudden movements and keep your hands visible at all times.



## Workplace violence: New California law

Effective July 1, California employers that fall within the scope of this law must establish, implement and maintain an effective written Workplace Violence Prevention Plan. This bill, California Senate Bill 553, was signed into law and California Labor Code section 6401.9 [on Sept. 30, 2023](#).



## Working safely outdoors: Insect bites and stings

Follow these tips for preventing bites and stings when working outdoors:

- **DO** wear an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-approved insect repellent and always follow the label directions for safe use. DEET and picaridin are two common, effective repellents.
- **DO** wear long sleeves, long pants, socks, gloves and outdoor shoes.
- **DO** tuck your shirt into your pants and tuck your pant legs into your socks.
- **DO** wear light-colored clothing because it makes insects easier to see.
- **DON'T** wear perfume or cologne when working outdoors because it may attract insects.

**Ticks:** Ticks can transmit Lyme disease, anaplasmosis and other illnesses. Only deer ticks carry Lyme disease. If you work in known tick-infested areas, check your body for ticks after every shift. If you find a tick attached to you, remove it using tweezers and monitor your health for

the next several weeks. Seek medical attention if you develop a rash or flu-like symptoms.

**Spiders:** Most spider bites are harmless. However, if a black widow or brown recluse spider bites you, seek immediate medical attention. Symptoms of a bite can include stomach pain and cramps, difficulty breathing, nausea, sweating, twitching, shaking and tingling in the hands.

**Mosquitoes:** They transmit a variety of diseases, including Zika virus and West Nile virus, depending on where you live. Familiarize yourself with the symptoms of the mosquito-borne illnesses common in your region and monitor yourself for these symptoms following a mosquito bite.

**Bees, hornets, and wasps:** These stings are painful; however, unless you have an allergy, they're generally harmless. An allergic reaction can cause hives, dizziness, nausea, trouble breathing and swallowing, and loss of consciousness. In some cases, it can be fatal. If you're allergic to bees and wasps, carry an EpiPen when working outdoors.



## Preventing heat stress

Working outdoors in hot weather can be uncomfortable, but did you know it can also be hazardous? If you don't take the right precautions when working in hot conditions, you can develop heat-related illnesses. These can range from mild annoyances, such as heat rash, to life-threatening heatstroke.

Heat illness occurs when your body can't adequately cool itself through sweating. This is most likely to happen during high-temperature, high-humidity weather, especially when you perform hard physical work under these conditions. You can be at risk of the following heat-related illnesses:

- **Heat rash** consists of a red, bumpy rash that can be itchy. It's usually not dangerous, but it can be uncomfortable, and it's a sign that hot conditions are affecting your body.
- **Heat syncope** (fainting). Sometimes heat can cause you to faint. This is called heat syncope and usually occurs when a person isn't used to working in a hot environment. It's usually not dangerous, and you can prevent it by moving around a little rather than standing still for long periods of time in the heat.
- **Heat cramps** are painful muscle cramps caused by a loss of salt when sweating. Drinking

electrolyte fluids to replace your body's salt can relieve heat cramps, but severe cramps may require a visit to a medical professional.

- **Heat exhaustion** is more serious. It results from the loss of fluid or salt or both through sweating. You might feel weak, dizzy and nauseated; your skin might become clammy; and your body temperature may be above normal. To treat heat exhaustion, rest in a cool place, drink sports drinks and remove any heavy clothing. If this doesn't help and you or a coworker starts vomiting or loses consciousness, call for emergency assistance immediately.
- **Heat stroke** is the most dangerous type of heat illness. It occurs when the body's natural cooling processes stop working and the ill person stops sweating. Symptoms include very hot and dry skin, confusion, convulsions, seizures and loss of consciousness. Heat stroke can cause death, so call an ambulance immediately if you or a coworker shows symptoms. While you're waiting for the ambulance, try to keep the victim cool, and provide fluids if the person is conscious.

These heat-related illnesses can be prevented by taking some very simple steps when working in hot conditions:

- **Drink plenty of water throughout the day.** In hot conditions, you should aim for about one cup every 15 to 20 minutes.
- **Wear a hat and light-colored clothing.**
- **Drink sports drinks** to help replace the salt you lose when you sweat.
- **Avoid caffeine and alcohol**, which can cause dehydration.
- **Take frequent breaks** in a cool, shady place. If the temperature spikes suddenly or you're new to working in hot conditions, take more frequent breaks, and gradually build up your workload while your body adapts.
- **Tell your supervisor** if you begin to experience symptoms of heat illness, and take a break in a cool, shaded area.