

Environmental conditions

In managing risk, consideration must be given to environmental factors and their impact on participants. Sometimes extreme weather conditions (e.g. heat, cold, rain or wind) make it best to postpone training or competition. Different regions of Australia vary in the weather conditions considered extreme, due to their residents' acclimatisation to the local environment. When scheduling junior matches, junior leagues and schools must always consider the player's health, giving careful consideration to the following environmental conditions.

Heat

Vigorous exercise in sport places some people at risk of heat illness. Even in cool weather, heat illness may occur in people exercising at high intensity for more than 45 minutes. The risk of heat illness is obviously greater in hot and humid weather because:

- › during high-intensity exercise in hot weather people may not be able to produce enough perspiration to adequately cool themselves; and
- › high humidity may prevent adequate evaporation of sweat.

Children perspire less and get less evaporative cooling than adults. In warm and hot weather, they have greater difficulty in cooling themselves; they look flushed, and feel hotter and more stressed than adults. Overweight children are particularly disadvantaged exercising in warm weather. Children should always be allowed to exercise at their preferred intensity, they should never be urged to exercise harder or compelled to play strenuous sport in warm weather. If children appear distressed or complain of feeling unwell, they should stop the activity.

In high temperatures and humid conditions, junior leagues and schools should consider postponing scheduled matches to a cooler part of the day or cancelling them. It is recommended junior football providers follow the Sports Medicine Australia guidelines available on their website sma.org.au.

Cold

In extremely cold temperatures, junior leagues and schools should consider postponing or cancelling scheduled matches. The AFL recommends junior leagues and schools apply common sense guidelines to climatic conditions that exist within their respective regions. Sports Medicine Australia (SMA) has state and territory branches and should be consulted when developing appropriate local policies to manage environmental conditions.

Fluid balance

Substantial amounts of water are lost through perspiration when exercising vigorously in the heat, so fluid balance is important at any time but needs more attention in some weather conditions. Junior participants do not instinctively drink enough to replace fluid lost during activity. Junior participants must be reminded to drink before, during and after training and competition.

- › Water is the most appropriate drink for re-hydration. However, diluted cordial or sports drinks may be supplied. Flavoured drinks may be more palatable to children who have consistently poor drinking habits during exercise.
- › Players should be encouraged to have their own drink bottles. This ensures that each player has access to an adequate level of replacement fluids and reduces the risk of contamination and passing on of viruses.
- › Where cups and a large container are supplied, cups should not be dipped into the container. Used cups should be washed or disposed of after use.
- › Cups should not be shared.

Sun protection

Junior leagues and clubs have a responsibility to protect junior participants, to the greatest extent practical, from the dangers of sun exposure. Junior participants should be encouraged to protect themselves against sun exposure by applying a 30+ sunscreen in warm weather.

Junior leagues and clubs should also maximise the provision of shaded areas at venues and events, and/or erect artificial shade.

Sports Medicine Australia has developed a policy related to preventing heat illness in sport. These general safety guidelines, which are specific to geographical locations, are available on the SMA website at sma.org.au.

Lightning

The AFL has produced a lightning policy for adoption by junior leagues and clubs. The policy provides a step-by-step process to assist volunteers when making the difficult decision to postpone matches and/or remove participants from the playing surface. The full policy can be found at afl.com.au/policies.

