



FOOTBALL IN EXTREME CONDITIONS

Guidelines for Prevention of Heat Injury

Heat stress and injury can lead to impaired player performance, physical distress e.g. dizziness, headaches, collapse and illness. In its extreme form it can be life threatening.

Preventing heat stress and injury maintains optimum performance and improves recovery.

To prevent heat stress, careful planning and preparation are required. Awareness of potential circumstances that can expose players and an appreciation of the broad variation of individual responses is important.

The following guidelines outline the basic elements of the AFL's strategies for heat stress in match conditions and at training. The AFL will assess the heat stress risk by reviewing information provided by the Bureau of Meteorology.

Note: In the AFL Pre-Season competition automatic heat guidelines are applied in the form of six (6) interchange players and two (2) substitute players, and shorter quarters.

Heat stress management strategies should also be applied at all training sessions, with communication between the Club medical professionals, fitness/conditioning coordinator, trainers and coaching staff being of the utmost importance. In particular clubs should use training sessions to identify high risk players and refine their management of football in hot conditions.

Heat injury is a subject of continuing research and these guidelines will be progressively updated.

▪ **Players**

- ensure adequate fluid intake prior to game and during game (500-700mls per quarter)
- monitor hydration by use of fluid balance and weighing to estimate fluid loss and percentage dehydration
- notify medical and coaching staffs when effected by heat or when performance is noticeably effected
- use water and electrolyte drinks
- use pre-game, game and post-game cooling strategies
- do not play in the heat with an infective illness
- apply 30+ sunscreen in sunny conditions

▪ **Clubs**

- use cooling aids – ice vests, spray bottles, sponges, fans (in rooms and on interchange bench) and shade
- choose heat permeable jumpers and socks
- research the effect of heat in AFL playing and training conditions and means to manage these environmental conditions

- mandatory reporting of heat stress illness in all AFL players
 - one Club doctor should be delegated to the primary responsibility to monitor and manage players for heat stress issues as they arise during a game
 - provide adequate fluids in appropriate bottles
 - ensure trainers are fit enough to access as many players as possible during the game
 - coordinate training times outside extreme conditions
 - have training sessions medically supervised
 - provide facilities for player cooling – shade, air conditioning, sprays and fans whether training or playing
- **Medical Officers**
 - identify “at risk” players and monitor their core temperatures, physical and mental performance and hydration state
 - do not play players suffering from a febrile illness, vomiting or diarrhoea
 - weigh players before the game, half time and at the end of the game and maintain some individual player fluid balance to identify fluid requirement
 - avoid adrenaline-like medication
 - provide thermometers (including rectal), equipment for resuscitation and intravenous fluid replacement
 - if playing in potentially difficult circumstances delegate management of heat stress and illness to one responsible medical officer
 - have adequate medical equipment available for managing heat stress conditions
 - report all cases of heat stress and heat stress illness in training sessions and games to the AFL Medical Officers
 - provide player education on the issue and how the club will manage such circumstances

- **AFL**

Where possible the AFL will schedule matches as much to avoid extremes of heat and allow for increased recovery from those conditions.

Venues to be equipped with cooling facilities in high risk circumstances – cool room (where possible), fans, shade, air conditioning and emergency medical facilities.

In addition the following concessions may be introduced:

- increase the number of water carriers to run fluids
- increase the length of intervals to enable teams to leave the field for the shade of the rooms at each break ie. 25 minutes for ½ time and/or 10 minutes for ¼ & ¾ time
- further reduce length of quarters
- consider postponing or rescheduling games