

POSITION STATEMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MAINTAINING HYDRATION TO OPTIMIZE PERFORMANCE AND MINIMIZE THE RISK FOR EXERTIONAL HEAT ILLNESS

**National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS)
Sports Medicine Advisory Committee (SMAC)**

DEHYDRATION – ITS EFFECTS ON PERFORMANCE AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO EXERTIONAL HEAT ILLNESS RISK

- Appropriate hydration before, during and after physical activity is integral to healthy, safe and successful sports participation.
- Weight loss during exercise and other physical activity represents primarily a loss of body water. A loss of just 1% to 2% of body weight (1.5 to 3 pounds for a 150 pound athlete) can negatively impact performance. A loss of 3% or more of body weight during vigorous exercise can also significantly increase the risk for exertional heat-related illness. If an athlete is already dehydrated prior to beginning activity, these effects will occur even sooner.
- Athletes should be weighed (in shorts and t-shirt) before and after warm or hot weather practice sessions and contests to assess their estimated change in hydration status.
- Athletes with a high body fat percentage can become significantly dehydrated and overheated faster than athletes with a lower body fat percentage while working out under the same environmental conditions at the same or similar workload.
- Athletes have different sweating rates and some lose much more water and salt through their sweat than others. “Salty sweaters” will often have noticeable salt stains on their clothing and skin after workouts, and they often have a higher risk of developing exertional muscle cramps.
- Poor heat acclimatization/fitness levels can greatly contribute to an athlete’s heat intolerance and exertional heat illness risk.
- Certain medications or current/recent illnesses (especially for illnesses involving gastrointestinal distress; e.g., vomiting or diarrhea) and/or fever can negatively affect an athlete’s hydration status and temperature regulation, thus increasing the risk for exertional heat illness.
- Environmental temperature and humidity each independently contribute to dehydration and exertional heat illness risk.
- Clothing that is dark or bulky, as well as protective equipment (such as helmets, shoulder pads and other padding or coverings) can increase body temperature, sweat loss and subsequent dehydration and exertional heat illness risk.

- Even naturally dry climates can have high humidity on the field if irrigation systems are run prior to early morning practice starts. This temporary increase in humidity will continue until the water completely soaks into the ground or evaporates.
- A heat index chart or **Wet Bulb Globe Thermometer (MSHSAA recommendation)** should be followed to help determine if practices/contests should be modified or canceled. The NOAA National Weather Service's heat index chart can be found at: <https://www.weather.gov/safety/heat-index> .
 - On-site wet-bulb temperature should be measured 10-15 minutes before practices or contests. The results should be used to determine if practices or contests should be started, modified or stopped.
 - If a wet-bulb temperature measurement is not available, the heat index for your approximate location can be determined by entering your postal zip code at: <http://www.osaa.org/heatindex>.
- The interplay of relative humidity and temperature on sweating and the risk for exertional heat illness:
 - A combined relative humidity of 40% and a temperature of 95 degrees Fahrenheit are associated with a *likely risk* of incurring significant sweat loss and exertional heat illness during strenuous physical activity.
 - However, even with a *lower air temperature* of only 85 degrees Fahrenheit, for example, the risk for extensive sweating and exertional heat illness would likely be the *same or great with a higher relative humidity* of 70% or more.

MSHSAA Recommendation

The MSHSAA Board of Directors approved the Wet Bulb Globe Thermometer (WBGT) as the recommended measurement practice and device for measuring acceptable heat/humidity levels for practices and contests. The use of WBGT is recommended throughout the calendar year when ambient temperature is above 80 degrees Fahrenheit. Member schools can secure and use the instruments found on the suggested list of WBGT's on the Sports Medicine Page of the MSHSAA website located at www.mshsaa.org.

WHAT TO DRINK DURING EXERCISE AND OTHER PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

- For most exercising athletes in most scenarios, water is appropriate and sufficient for pre-hydration and rehydration. Water is quickly absorbed, well-tolerated, an excellent thirst quencher and cost effective.
- Traditional sports drinks with an appropriate carbohydrate and sodium formulation may provide additional benefit in the following general situations:
 - Prolonged, continuous or intermittent activity of greater than 60 minutes.
 - Multiple, same-day bouts of intense, continuous or repeated exertion.
 - Warm-to-hot and humid conditions.
- Traditional sports drinks with an appropriate carbohydrate and sodium formulation may provide additional benefit for the following individual conditions:
 - Poor hydration prior to participation.
 - A high sweat rate and/or “salty sweater.”
 - Poor caloric intake prior to participation.
 - Poor acclimatization to heat and humidity.
- A 6% to 8% carbohydrate formulation is the maximum that should be utilized in a sports drink. Any greater concentration will slow stomach emptying and potentially cause the athlete to feel bloated. An appropriate sodium concentration (0.4-1.2 grams per liter) will help with fluid retention and distribution and decrease the risk of exertional muscle cramping.

WHAT NOT TO DRINK DURING EXERCISE AND OTHER PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

- Fruit juices with greater than 8% carbohydrate content and carbonated soda can both result in a bloated feeling and abdominal cramping.
- Athletes should be aware that nutritional supplements are not limited to pills and powders, as many of the new “energy” drinks contain stimulants such as caffeine and/or ephedrine.
 - These stimulants may increase the risk of heat illness and/or heart problems with exercise. They can also cause anxiety, jitteriness, nausea and upset stomach or diarrhea.
 - Many of these drinks are being produced by traditional water, soft drink and sports drink companies which can cause confusion in the sports community. As is true with other forms of supplements, these “power drinks,” “energy drinks” or “fluid supplements” are not regulated by the FDA; thus, the purity and accuracy of contents on the label is not guaranteed.
 - Many of these beverages which claim to increase power, energy and endurance (among other claims) may have additional ingredients that are not listed. Such ingredients may be harmful and may be banned by governing bodies like the NCAA, USOC or individual state athletic associations.
 - See the **NFHS Position Statement and Recommendations for the use of Energy Drinks in Young Athletes** for further information.

HYDRATION AND FLUID INTAKE TIPS AND GUIDELINES

- Many athletes do not voluntarily drink enough water to prevent significant dehydration during physical activity.
- Drink regularly throughout all physical activities. An athlete cannot always rely on his or her sense of thirst to sufficiently maintain proper hydration.
- Drink before, during and after practices and games. For example:
 - Drink 16 ounces of fluid 2 hours before physical activity.
 - Drink another 8 to 16 ounces 15 minutes before physical activity.
 - During physical activity, drink 54 to 8 ounces of fluid every 15 to 20 minutes (some athletes who sweat considerably can safely and comfortably tolerate up to 48 ounces per hour).
 - After physical activity, drink 16 to 20 ounces of fluid for every pound lost during physical activity to achieve normal hydration status before the next practice or competition (if there is sufficient time to do this safely and comfortably). **NOTE: Excessive fluid intake in a short period of time can be dangerous to one's health (see below on hyponatremia).**
- The volume and color of your urine is an excellent way of determining if you are well hydrated. Small amounts of dark urine mean that you need to drink more, while a “regular” amount of light-colored or nearly clear urine generally means you are well hydrated. A urine color chart can be accessed at: <http://at.uwa.edu/admin/UM/urinecolorchart.doc>
- Hyponatremia is the opposite of dehydration and is a rare, but potentially deadly, condition where there is an excessive amount of water or other low-sodium fluids (including most sports drinks) in the blood and the sodium content of the blood is, consequently, diluted to dangerous levels. It is most commonly seen during endurance events such as marathons when participants consume large amounts of water or other beverages over several hours, far exceeding fluid lost through sweating. Affected individuals may exhibit disorientation, altered mental status, headache, lethargy and seizures. A confirmed diagnosis can only be made by testing blood sodium levels. Suspected hyponatremia is a medical emergency and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) must be activated. It is treated by administering intravenous fluids containing high levels of sodium.

References

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