

A Message from the National Athletic Trainers' Association Board of Directors Disclaimer for Exertional Heat Illnesses Consensus Statement

Background Information

Heat illness is one of the most pressing issues in athletics today, particularly considering the untimely deaths of several high-profile athletes. In response to the need for information on this topic, the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) Pronouncements Committee developed a position statement titled "National Athletic Trainers' Association Position Statement: Exertional Heat Illnesses" (referred to as the "position statement"), which was published in the September 2002 *Journal of Athletic Training*.

The position statement also served as the basis for the document released by the Inter-Association Task Force on Exertional Heat Illnesses, a group convened at the request of NATA to develop universal guidelines for reducing the risk of heat illness. The Inter-Association Task Force on Exertional Heat Illnesses Consensus Statement (referred to as the "consensus statement") was published on pages 24-29 of the June *NATA News*, and is supported by representatives of several distinguished organizations, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine and American College of Sports Medicine.

This Issue

Since publication of the Inter-Association Task Force consensus statement, several NATA members have questioned the wet bulb globe temperature chart (WBGT) information shown on Table 1, which is also referenced in NATA's official position statement as Table 3. However, according to Douglas Casa, PhD, ATC, chair of both the NATA Pronouncements Committee and the Inter-Association Task Force on Exertional Heat Illnesses, the intent of both documents is to **serve as flexible statements** that can and should be modified to meet the needs of ATCs working in different climates and within different financial and staffing situations.

"Certified athletic trainers work in a variety of professional and geographic settings, and as an organization we understand and appreciate the diversity within this group," Casa said. "Our goal with these statements is to provide our colleagues with cutting-edge information that will serve as a starting point for the development of policies and procedures that meet the needs of our members' individual settings and circumstances. Obviously the ATC in Florida will adapt the recommendations to his or her environment, while the ATC in Maine will make different adjustments."

The Solution

As a result of this discussion, the NATA Board of Directors opted to add the following disclaimer to the Inter-Association Task Force consensus statement. The disclaimer was developed by NATA College University Athletic Trainers' Committee Chair Ron Courson, ATC, PT, and approved by NATA legal counsel.

Athletic trainers should recognize that temperature ranges might vary widely based upon geographic regions. Athletic trainers may practice in regions, such as the southeastern United States, where the WBGT is routinely in the high or extreme or hazardous level of risk throughout a significant part of the year. In these regions, while it may not be practical to reschedule or delay events, the athletic trainer must recognize that the level of risk is high and take appropriate steps to reduce risk.

Future Statements

Other organizations involved in the development of the consensus statement will be asked to include this disclaimer when releasing the document. In addition, all future NATA position statements will include a disclaimer, written by NATA legal counsel and approved by the NATA Board, noting the flexibility of the documents.

According to NATA District Three Director Rod Walters, DA, ATC, who initiated discussions regarding the heat illness issue after hearing from members in the southern areas of the United States, this approach is a logical one. By adding the disclaimer, NATA is providing certified athletic trainers with important information and guidelines while acknowledging that circumstances vary from member to member.

“It is very important that NATA continue to research and publish position statements, and I am proud of the Pronouncements Committee’s work in this area,” Walters said. “But as an athletic trainer working in the trenches, I understand that some of the challenges we face in the field may make it impossible to implement our guidelines in all circumstances. By adding a three-sentence statement, we are recognizing that situations vary – depending on location, staffing and financial issues and a host of other variables.”