



Question & Answer

How can I tell if a worker is dehydrated? What signs should I look for?



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Dehydration takes place when the body uses or loses more fluid than it takes in, and it can have a devastating impact on an employee's health and performance. Even a small amount of dehydration can result in decreased cognitive and motor skills. In fact, studies have shown that just **two percent dehydration impairs performance** in tasks that require attention, motor, and memory. More severe dehydration can cause a range of problems, from urinary and kidney problems to seizures and loss of consciousness.

Unfortunately, not every worker will realize they are experiencing early symptoms of dehydration, so it's important for supervisors and co-workers to keep an eye out for the signs. But what exactly are those signs?



Bad Breath

Saliva is antibacterial. So when dehydration prevents your body from making enough of it, it can't prevent **bacteria** overgrowth and keep your mouth smelling fresh. If one of your workers has bad breath (and it isn't just from too much garlic at lunch), it could be a sign that they need more fluids to keep the bacteria at bay.



Dry Skin

People experiencing dehydration often display dry skin, which may also be flushed. An easy way to confirm is to test skin elasticity by pinching the skin on the back of the hand. If it remains "tented" and takes a bit of time to return to its normal, flat state, the worker is likely dehydrated and should consume fluids.



Headaches or Disorientation

If a worker is complaining about a headache, light-headedness, or disorientation, a good drink of water could be the answer. When the body doesn't have enough fluid to sustain its regular functions, these are some of the ways that it can start to manifest.



Signs of Fatigue, Confusion, or Anger

Studies show that even mild dehydration (we're talking about 1.5 percent fluid loss) can affect mood, energy, and the ability to think clearly. If a worker seems forgetful or less alert than usual, recommend that they take steps to rehydrate.



Urine Color

The color of the urine is one of the surest signs of dehydration. Clear urine indicates that the individual is well hydrated, and the darker the urine gets, the more dehydrated they are. If the urine is a light or bright yellow, it's a sign that dehydration is setting in and more fluids need to be consumed. If the urine is a darker yellow or appear orange, you're dealing with severe dehydration and need to take immediate action.

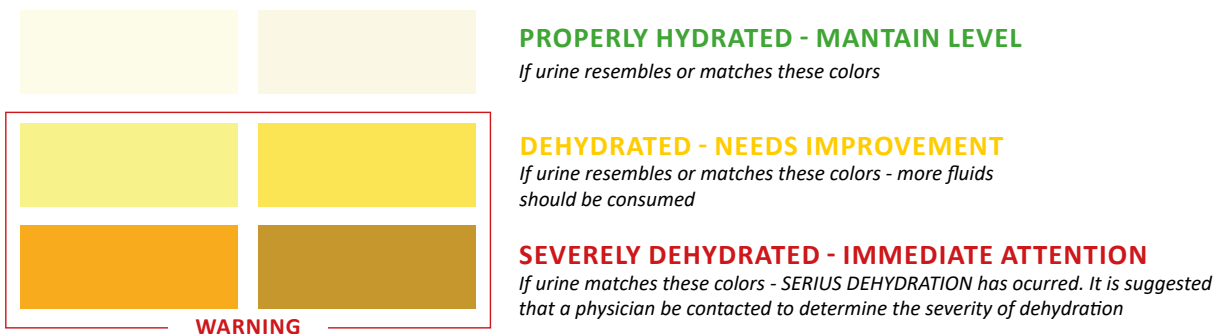


Image by Squwincher. See the Essential Hydration Safety Cheatsheet for more.

Conclusion

Ideally, your workers will stay on top of hydrating, taking breaks, and staying safe so you won't ever notice these symptoms. But it's important to learn the signs and keep an eye out for anyone in need of hydration.