

Extreme Weather Policy

Introduction

Environmental factors regularly affect the conduct of Little Athletics events and occasionally extremely adverse weather conditions may give rise to a need to assess whether participants, officials and spectators are in danger.

Extreme weather may include any weather conditions that threaten the immediate or long-term safety of individuals, such as heat, rain, lightning, wind, or any other unusual or unpredictable weather conditions.

In extreme weather conditions, officials and administrators in charge of Little Athletics events may decide to modify, postpone or cancel the event to protect athletes, officials and other participants from exposure to the elements or physical stress. This policy has been prepared to provide guidance to event organisers regarding the effective management of extreme weather conditions.

Heat

Heat-related injuries or illnesses pose a risk to athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers and spectators at Little Athletic events. Heat illness can sometimes occur at temperature levels well below those considered to be a risk and can present in a variety of forms including heat exhaustion and the more severe heat stroke.

Symptoms of heat illness include:

- dizziness
- nausea
- fatigue
- lack of sweating
- lack of co-ordination, clumsiness, unsteadiness
- confusion
- aggression
- altered consciousness
- ashen grey pale skin

Heat exhaustion occurs when athletes collapse after exercise due to a post-exercise drop in blood pressure. Anyone suffering heat exhaustion should be laid down in a cool place with their legs and pelvis raised. Excessive clothing should be removed and attempts made to cool them down by wetting the skin and fanning with cool air. Ice packs should also be applied to the groin, armpits and neck and cool water given to drink. A person suffering from heat exhaustion will normally recover quite rapidly.

Heat stroke is a rare, but dangerous condition and occurs when athletes show signs of altered mental function, loss of consciousness or collapse during exercise because body temperature control is impaired. Anyone suspected to be suffering from heat stroke should be treated as above. If they remain confused, vomiting or show signs of altered conscious, cooling should continue and an ambulance called immediately.

Athletes are also at risk of dehydration when exercising in increased heat, due to increased perspiration and respiration. This will make them more susceptible to fatigue and muscle cramps. Athletes, officials, coaches and spectators should be encouraged to consume adequate fluid intake before, during and after exercise on hot days.

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Ways to reduce the risk of heat illness:

- If hot weather is expected, parents/guardians should be encouraged to ensure that athletes are sufficiently hydrated in the lead up to the day's activities and take proactive measures such as:
 - packing sufficient drinks
 - packing ice packs to be held against the skin for a cooling effect
 - packing personal spray bottles and/or battery operated fans
 - packing umbrellas or other portable shade structures.
- Refer to the Little Athletics ACT SunSmart policy for ways to minimise exposure to harmful UV rays.
- Ensure that adequate shade is provided and encourage all athletes to stay in shaded areas whenever they are not competing or training.
- Encourage younger children (under 13 years) to drink water regularly (as they may not experience thirst as much as older children and adults).
- Venues should have equipment available to measure ambient temperature. Information regarding humidity can be obtained from www.bom.gov.au/places/, via apps such as Weatherzone, or by using a hygrometer.
- At ambient temperatures between 31-37 degrees Celsius, or between 31-35 degrees Celsius when humidity exceeds fifty percent, consideration should be given to postponing distance events until the temperature drops.
- If the ambient temperature reaches 38 degrees Celsius in dry heat or 36 degrees when the weather is humid, all activities must be cancelled until the temperature drops. In this circumstance, consideration should also be given to the time it takes to pack away equipment, and it may be necessary for centres to determine a lower temperature than these at which events will be ceased to reduce the risk to volunteers.

Wet weather

The safety of athletes must remain paramount when deciding whether to postpone or cancel an event due to rain. Consideration must be given to factors such as pooling of water on track surfaces, visibility and the presence of thunder and lightning (see below).

In the event of hail, all events must be suspended immediately and all athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers and spectators should move to a sheltered area until the hazard clears.

Thunderstorms & lightning

Thunderstorms can develop quickly and present a risk to athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers and spectators at Little Athletic events.

Some facts about lightning include:

- all thunderstorms produce lightning and can therefore pose danger
- lightning can strike as far as fifteen kilometres away from any rainfall
- whenever thunder is heard, lightning is close enough to pose an immediate threat to your location
- a lightning threat can exist when thunder is heard but skies are clear and it is sunny
- many lightning casualties are due to people not seeking shelter soon enough, occurring before thunderstorm rains have moved into the area

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- a large number of casualties occur after rain has dissipated, due to people leaving sheltered areas too soon.

Ways to reduce the risk from lightning:

- ensure that one person is delegated to have the authority to call for the suspension and subsequent resumption of activities
- communicate safe structures to athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers and spectators if thunderstorms are forecast or imminent. Such safe structures include:
 - large, fully enclosed buildings
 - a fully enclosed vehicle with a metal roof and closed windows
- ensure athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers and spectators are directed away from unsafe locations and situations if thunderstorms are occurring or imminent, such as:
 - open fields
 - close vicinity to tall structures such as trees, light poles, discus cages
 - using indoor phones
 - using electrical appliances
 - using umbrellas
- follow the 30/30 rule:
 - if the interval between observing the flash and hearing the thunder is 30 seconds or less, all those in exposed area must seek shelter in a safe structure
 - wait at least 30 minutes after the last sound of thunder or observation of lightning before leaving shelter

First aid for lightning:

Lightning victims are safe to handle as they do not carry an electrical charge and require immediate medical attention. If someone is struck by lightning:

- immediately call 000
- check for a pulse and breathing and begin CPR if necessary
- if possible, move the victim to a safe place, whilst not jeopardising your own safety.

Cold

In the event of cold weather, athletes should be encouraged to keep warm and wear adequate clothing. Long breaks between events should be avoided, to prevent athletes from cooling down too much, to reduce the risk of muscle-related injuries.

Strong winds

Strong winds pose a risk to athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers and spectators at Little Athletic events. In the event of severe weather warnings from the Bureau of Meteorology, in particular where strong winds are predicted, consideration should be given to cancelling or postponing the events.

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If strong winds occur during a Little Athletics event:

- all athletes, coached, officials, volunteers and spectators should be asked to immediately leave the outside area and take shelter inside a substantial building
- if a substantial building is not available, a hard-topped metal vehicle with closed windows may provide protection
- all individuals should remain inside shelter, away from windows until the threat has passed
- once the strong winds have ceased, an appropriate delegate such as the Competition Manager or Committee member should assess the area for damage before deciding whether the event should resume. No individuals should be allowed to leave the sheltered area until this delegate gives them permission to do so.

Smoke and dust

Smoke and airborne dust can be by-products of conditions such as wind and bushfires and can create a risk to athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers and spectators who suffer from conditions such as asthma, allergies and heart conditions. Such weather conditions should be monitored and consideration be given to suspending activities if there is a significant potential risk.

References

Sports Medicine Australia Hot Weather Guidelines (Web download document) available at <http://sma.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2009/05/hot-weather-guidelines-web-download-doc-2007.pdf>

Sports Medicine Australia Beat the Heat Fact Sheet available at <http://sma.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/beat-the-heat-2011.pdf>

Little Athletics ACT SunSmart policy, available at www.actlaa.org.au

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