

Seasonal Readiness

A message from our Chief Medical Health Officer



Health and well-being for all | Quality | Compassion | Safety | Integrity |



May 14, 2026

Dear Community Leader,

Is your community ready for heat and wildfire smoke?

The Government of Canada predicts 2026 will be [one of the hottest years](#) on record. Temperatures in B.C. are increasing, and heat events are longer, hotter, and more frequent. Heat is a major weather-related cause of death in Canada. Poor air quality due to wildfire smoke also has harmful health effects.

Interior Health's Medical Health Officers are emphasizing preparedness. Interior Health has a [Heat and Smoke Readiness for Community Leaders web page](#) which will help you prepare including:

- Steps communities can take to prepare for heat and wildfire smoke.
- Ways Interior Health can support your community and actions we are taking.
- Funding opportunities for heat and smoke planning, including the 2026 [Financial Assistance Standards](#) from Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness for extreme heat and air quality emergency response.
- Information regarding the upcoming 2026 3-tiered colour-coded weather alerts from Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) and upcoming updates from BC Provincial Heat Alert and Response System (BC HARS) for recommended actions for local heat planning.
- Heat and air quality messages you can share with your community.
- How to sign up to receive notifications for heat warnings and air quality issues.

Preparing for extreme heat:

- **Be familiar with the latest BC HARS and how the different warnings impact your response planning.**
- **Follow BC HARS guidance and consider:**
 - Extending operating hours of indoor cooling spaces. Consider using a local school, meeting hall or other gathering place as a temporary cooling space.
 - Opening overnight cooling centers. These centres help support community members experiencing vulnerabilities as high overnight temperatures can be dangerous.
 - Extending operating hours and expanding access to outdoor amenities, including drinking water stations, spray parks, and shaded outdoor areas.
 - Encouraging heat check-ins in neighbourhoods and communities, especially for older adults, people who are socially isolated, and those who are unhoused.
 - Access to drinking water, outdoor shaded areas, or misting stations for people who are unhoused.

- **Protect outdoor workers.** Follow WorkSafe BC guidance on [heat-related](#) workplace safety.

Early season heat can be more dangerous because people aren't acclimatized. In spring and early summer people can experience health impacts at temperatures up to 3°C lower than they would in mid-to-late summer.

The use of well fitted respirators (e.g. N95) when people are outdoors minimizes exposure to wildfire smoke health risks.

Preparing for wildfire smoke:

- **Support, establish, and promote cleaner air spaces.** Identify publicly accessible locations (e.g. libraries, malls, community centres) and publicize their locations and hours.
- **Support public spaces in improving air filtration.** Support operators with upgrading HVAC systems for the summer. [MERV 13 or higher and HEPA filters](#) provide protection from wildfire smoke.
- **Protect outdoor workers.** Follow WorkSafe BC guidance on [smoke-related](#) workplace safety, including the option of well-fitted respirators (e.g. N95) to reduce exposure to wildfire smoke.
- **Check air quality in the region.** Visit [BC Air Quality](#) or [AQ Map](#) and be familiar with Ministry of Environment [Air Quality Warnings](#).
- **Review the need for local monitors** per the [AQ Map](#) and where possible procure and implement local PM 2.5 monitors through [BC Lung's Carter's Project](#).
- **Utilize information from Air Quality Warnings, provincial Air Quality Health Index (AQHI), or modified AQHI from local monitors** to guide decisions around:
 - outdoor activities for the general and at-risk population;
 - cancelling outdoor events in the event of severely reduced air quality;
 - implementing cleaner air shelters.

For more information about Interior Health's emergency response plans for extreme weather events contact ihextremeweatherresponse@interiorhealth.ca.

To learn how inclusive, health-conscious community planning can support climate adaptation and resiliency planning, or to learn more about how Interior Health can support communities in seasonal readiness planning (for heat and smoke), contact healthycommunities@interiorhealth.ca.

Interior Health would like to recognize and acknowledge the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the Dăkelh Dené, Ktunaxa, Nlaka'pamux, Secwépemc, St'át'imc, syilx, and Tšilhqot'in Nations where we live, learn, collaborate, and work together.