

Extreme Heat and Child Care Facilities

Extreme heat events, or heat waves, are extended periods of time (at least two days) with hotter than average temperatures for a region. These events usually occur during the summer months between May and September. In B.C., they are expected to become more severe, frequent, and longer. It is important to plan and prepare for these events before they occur.



Health effects of extreme heat

Heat related illness occurs when your body gains heat faster than it can cool itself. Risk increases at indoor temperatures higher than 26°C and temperatures higher than 31°C can be dangerous. Heat events can impact anyone's health and even a few days of extreme heat can lead to severe illness and death. Who is at higher risk of heat related illness?

- **Children at a higher risk** from extreme heat are:
 - Infants and young children.
 - Children with asthma, heart conditions, kidney problems and diarrhea.
 - Children with mental and physical disabilities.
 - Children with developmental disorders.
 - Children who take certain medications.
 - See [Preparing for Heat Events \(BCCDC\)](#) for others at higher risk.
- **Other factors** that could increase risk:
 - Not drinking enough water.
 - Increased body mass.
 - Certain medications which make it harder for the body to regulate temperature.
 - Poor physical fitness.
 - Previous heat stroke.
 - High humidity.

**Sunburned skin loses its sweating efficiency.
This makes it harder for your body to regulate its temperature.**

- **Symptoms** of heat-related illness:

Mild or moderate symptoms:

- Headache
- Nausea
- Weakness
- Irritability
- Light-headed or dizziness
- Disorientation
- Thirst or dry mouth
- Difficulty swallowing
- Fatigue, malaise
- Heat rash, heat edema (swelling)
- Decreased urine output
- Increased heart rate
- Skin feels very warm
- Body temperature above 38°C (100°F)

Severe symptoms:

- Looking sleepy and is difficult to wake up, feeling very tired, lethargic, or weak
- Movement and coordination problems
- Leg or stomach cramps, complains of tummy ache
- Vomiting and diarrhea
- Dizziness, confusion, or difficulty speaking
- Seizures, fainting, or loss of consciousness
- Hot, flushed skin or very pale skin
- Not urinating or very little urinating
- Body temperature above 39°C (102°F)

If you're experiencing mild to moderate symptoms call 8-1-1 or your medical practitioner.

Mild to moderate heat illness can quickly become severe.

If you're experiencing severe symptoms call 9-1-1. While waiting for help, cool the individual right away. See methods below.

Severe heat illness and heat stroke are medical emergencies.

- **To cool the child's body immediately:**
 - If you can, move the child to a cooler place.
 - Remove excess clothing.
 - Apply cold water, wet towels, or ice packs around the body, especially the neck, armpits, and groin.
- **Signs of dehydration in infants and young children include:**
 - Peeing less.
 - Fewer than 4 wet diapers in 24 hours in infants (0-1 year).
 - Fewer than 3 wet diapers in 24 hours in children (1-5 years).
 - Peeing little, and fewer than 4 times a day for children not in diapers.
 - Being extra thirsty.
 - Heavy sweating followed by no sweating at all, the skin is hot, dry, and flushed.
 - Seeming more fussy than normal.
 - No tears when crying.
 - Dry mouth and tongue.
 - Faster heartbeat.
 - Shallow breathing (especially with infants).
 - Sunken eyes.
 - Sunken soft spot on the head (if 18 months or younger).

Keep in mind that infants and young children may not show the early signs and symptoms of heat-related illness. They may just look unwell or be more fussy than usual.

- **Resources:**

- [Preparing for Heat Events \(BCCDC\)](#)
- [Heat-related Illness \(HealthLink BC\)](#)
- [Medications and Heat \(Ministry of Health\)](#)
- [Fact Sheet: Staying Healthy in the Heat \(Health Canada\)](#)
- [Keeping Children Cool! Protect Your Child From Extreme Heat \(Health Canada\)](#)
- [Extreme Heat Event – Health Checklist \(NCCEH\)](#)

How to prepare for extreme heat in your community

- **Develop a plan** for how you will continue to meet the health, safety, and well-being of all children in care during periods of extreme heat.

Consider:

- Adding management of extreme heat to your emergency preparedness plan.
 - How will you continue to meet the requirements of active play?
 - How will you monitor the effectiveness of programming that has changed due to extreme heat?
 - How will you document any changes to programming due to extreme heat?
 - The length of time spent outside related to transportation such as walking to a park or waiting for public transit and how this could be minimized.
- **Access Weather Information and Alerts** so you know when to take extra precautions and care.
 - You can monitor current conditions and subscribe for alerts at:
 - [Environment Canada website](#)
 - [Alertable](#)
 - [Download the WeatherCAN app](#)
 - [Media Centre & Alerts \(Interior Health\)](#)

Heat events often occur at the same time as wildfire smoke events in our communities. For more information on air quality, please refer to [Interior Health's Air Quality page](#) and/or Community Care Facility Licensing's [Wildfire Smoke](#) handout.

- [BC Provincial Heat Alert and Response System \(BC HARS\)](#) describes criteria used to issue a heat warning and extreme heat emergency. HARS helps warn the public about heat risk and helps communities prepare and protect themselves.
- **Support employees** on how to monitor and recognize the signs and symptoms of heat-related illness and dehydration.
 - Develop a system to regularly monitor children for signs of heat-related illness, especially if the facility does not have air conditioning, and when indoor temperatures are at their highest.
 - Develop a system to regularly monitor children for signs of dehydration.
 - Ensure employees know how to respond to heat-related illness and when medical care is required.

- **Maintain hydration.**
 - Encourage children to drink plenty of liquids, especially water, before feeling thirsty.
 - Children may be dehydrated even if they are not thirsty.
 - Eat more fruits and vegetables, as they have a high-water content, and can be help with hydration as well.
 - If a child is taking medications which increase their risk to heat-related illnesses, ask the parents or guardians if their medical practitioner has been consulted on how much water they should consume on hot days. Ensure their care plan has been updated accordingly.
- **Prepare your facility** to keep the cooler air inside.
 - Install awnings, shutters, blinds, or curtains over your windows to keep the sun out during the day.
 - Practice opening doors and windows to move cool air in at night and/or morning and shutting windows during the day to prevent hot outdoor air from coming inside. This may not be ideal during wildfire smoke events, particularly for children at a higher risk for experiencing health effects, however, heat poses a higher risk than wildfire smoke for most people and should be prioritized. See Community Care Facility Licensing's [Wildfire Smoke](#) handout for tips and guidance.
 - Get a digital room thermometer so you know when the facility is getting too hot.
 - If your facility **has central air conditioning**, ensure it has been serviced and is working effectively prior to the summer heat.
 - If your facility **has access to portable or window air conditioning units** but the entire facility cannot be kept cool, create a cool room or spaces where groups can alternate and cool down periodically.
 - If your facility **does not have access to air conditioning** and /or a cool room, find an air-conditioned location, such as a library or community centre, to spend time during the hottest part of the day. If needed visit an emergency cooling centre. Locations may be listed on [EmergencyMapBC](#) at the discretion of local governments. If cooling locations are not listed on the map in your area, visit your [Band office or local government](#).
 - Check to see if you are eligible for a free portable air conditioner from BC Hydro. See link in blue box on page 6.

If temperatures in your facility affect the health, safety, and well-being of children in care and/or your ability to provide care, submit a service delivery problem reportable incident form. A [health and safety plan](#) may be required by Licensing.

- Check that you have working fans. Ensure they are kept at a safe distance from children. **Important:** While fans can help you feel more comfortable, they do not work to lower body temperature at temperatures over 35°C.
- Keep children's bodies cool by:
 - Wearing a damp towel or shirt.
 - Putting an ice tray in front of a fan.
 - Using a personal mister or spray bottle.
 - Drinking lots of water.
 - Lower activity levels.

- **Resources:**
 - [Be Prepared for Heat This Summer \(Interior Health\)](#)
 - [Be Prepared for Extreme Heat and Drought \(BC Government\)](#)
 - [Extreme Health Preparedness Guide \(BC Government\)](#)
- **Limit exposure** to extreme heat as much as possible. This is especially important for children at a higher risk of experiencing health effects. Monitor the current local weather conditions and assess whether outdoor activities are safe for children in care.
 - When outside temperatures are high, it is best to stay indoors with cooler air to protect your health. The hottest time of the day is approximately 3 p.m. but can extend before and after.
 - Consider moving active play activities indoors or reducing the intensity of the activity and/or the time spent outdoors. Community recreation centres and gymnasiums typically have clean, filtered air and air conditioning which make them a safer space for activities.
 - Plan outdoor activities for mornings when temperatures are cooler.
 - Children are not always able to recognize or communicate how heat affects them. Ensure they stay hydrated, and employees are monitoring for symptoms of heat-related illness and dehydration.
 - There will be times when children will be outdoors. During these times:
 - It is safest to keep babies younger than 12 months out of direct sunlight.
 - Avoid sunburn. The sun's ultraviolet (UV) radiation is the strongest between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.
 - Use a broad spectrum (UVA and UVB) sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher on exposed skin and an SPF 30 lip balm. Make sure to use products approved by the Canadian Dermatology Association (look for their name or logo on the label). Ensure sunscreen is kept out of children's reach.
 - Apply sunscreen 30 minutes before exposure to the sun so it is absorbed by the skin and less likely to rub or wash off. Apply the sunscreen according to instructions on the package and reapply every couple of hours, after getting wet (sprinklers/swimming), or following active play time.
 - Wear wide brimmed hats, sunglasses and light-weight, loose fitting clothing. Sun-protective swimsuits and hats are designed for water and sun exposure.
 - Seek shaded spaces for outdoor active play.
 - **Resources:**
 - [Heat Safety \(Interior Health\)](#) - Poster
 - [Keeping Kids Cool \(BCCDC\)](#) – Video
 - [Sun Safety for Children \(HealthLink BC\)](#)
 - [Safety for Infants and Young Children During Extreme Heat \(HealthLinkBC\)](#)
 - [Be Prepared for Hot Weather \(First Nations Health Authority\)](#)



Additional Resources

- [What is a Heat Warning? \(BCCDC\)](#) – Video
- [What is a Heat Emergency? \(BCCDC\)](#) - Video
- [Heat Event Response Planning \(BCCDC\)](#)
- [Heat Response Planning for Southern Interior B.C. Communities: A Toolkit \(Interior Health\)](#)
- [Stay Cool & Safe During Heat Waves Colouring Sheet \(First Nations Health Authority\)](#)

BC Hydro Air Conditioner Offer

Through the Portable AC Offer of the Energy Conservation Assistance Program (ECAP), BC Hydro offers portable air conditioners for FREE. Check if you are eligible and apply online.

[Free portable air conditioners \(bchydro.com\)](https://www.bchydro.com)

Please check the [Interior Health \(https://www.interiorhealth.ca/health-and-wellness/natural-disasters-and-emergencies\)](https://www.interiorhealth.ca/health-and-wellness/natural-disasters-and-emergencies) website for more Emergency Information.