

Extreme Heat and Community Care Home 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 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?

- **Individuals at a higher risk** from extreme heat are:
 - Infants and young children.
 - Older adults.
 - Individuals with a pre-existing health condition such as: diabetes, heart, or respiratory disease.
 - Individuals with mental health illnesses such as schizophrenia, depression, or anxiety.
 - Individuals with limited mobility.
 - Individuals with cognitive impairment.
 - Individuals with substance use disorders.
 - 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 such as diuretics, water pills, and some medications used to treat mental health.
 - Poor physical fitness.
 - Use of alcohol or other substances.
 - 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 or heat cramps
- Decreased urine output
- Increased heart rate
- Skin feels very warm and sweaty
- Body temperature over 38°C (100°F)

Severe symptoms:

- Severe nausea and vomiting
- Fainting or loss of consciousness
- Confusion or disorientation
- Difficulty speaking
- Movement and coordination problems
- Lethargic
- Not sweating
- Hot, flushed skin or very pale skin
- Not urinating or very little urinating
- Rapid breathing and faint, rapid heart rate
- Body temperature >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 your body immediately:**
 - If you can, move the individual to a cooler place.
 - Remove excess clothing.
 - Apply cold water, wet towels, or ice packs around the body, especially the neck, armpits, and groin.
- **Resources:**
 - [Preparing for Heat Events \(BCCDC\)](#)
 - [Heat-related Illness \(HealthLink BC\)](#)
 - [Medications and Heat \(Ministry of Health\)](#)
 - [Fact Sheet: Staying Healthy in the Heat \(Health Canada\)](#)
 - [Heat & Substance Use Fact sheet \(Interior Health\)](#)
 - [Heat & Mental Health Fact Sheet \(Interior Health\)](#)
 - [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 persons in care during periods of extreme heat.
Consider:
 - Adding management of extreme heat to your emergency preparedness plan.
 - How will you continue to provide an ongoing planned program of physical, social, and recreational activities?
 - 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 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 and Alert 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 persons in care for signs of heat-related illness, especially in the evenings if the facility does not have air conditioning, and when indoor temperatures are at their highest.
 - Develop a system to regularly monitor persons in care for signs of dehydration.
 - Ensure employees know how to respond to heat-related illness and when medical care is required.
- **Maintain hydration.**
 - Encourage individuals to drink plenty of liquids, especially water, before feeling thirsty.
 - Individuals 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 person in care is taking medications such as water pills or on a limited fluid intake protocol, ensure their medical practitioner is 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 shutting windows during the day to prevent hot outdoor air from coming inside. This may not be ideal during wildfire smoke events, particularly, for individuals 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 the air conditioning fails and the facility cannot be kept cool leading to revised provision of care and services submit a reportable incident form as this is a service delivery problem. A [health and safety plan](#) may be requested by Licensing.
 - If your facility **has access to portable or window air conditioning units**, keep persons in care in the cooler rooms as much as possible.
 - If persons in care's bedrooms cannot be kept cool and sleeping arrangements are adjusted such as sleeping in cooler rooms, basement or a different location submit a reportable incident form as this is a service delivery problem. Ensure a [health and safety plan](#) has been developed.
 - If your facility **does not have access to air conditioning** and/or a cool room, find an air-conditioned location, such as a mall, library, or community centre, to spend time during the hottest part of the day and consider visiting 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 condition from BC Hydro. See link in blue box on page 6.
 - If the facility temperature cannot be cooled over night and early morning and persons in care are moved to alternative locations for safety submit a reportable incident form as this is a service delivery problem. Ensure a [health and safety plan](#) has been developed.
 - Check that you have working fans. **Important:** While fans can help you feel more comfortable, they do not work to lower body temperature at temperatures over 35°C.
 - Keep persons in care's bodies cool by:
 - Wearing a damp towel or shirt.
 - Taking a cool shower or bath.
 - Using a damp sheet at night.
 - 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 \(Interior Health\)](#)
 - [How Older Adults and Seniors Can Prepare for Extreme Heat Events \(Interior Health\)](#)
 - [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 individuals at a higher risk of experiencing health effects. Monitor the current local weather conditions and assess whether outdoor activities are safe for persons 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 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
 - Consider moving outdoor recreation 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 and evenings when temperatures are cooler.
 - If you cannot maintain cooler air within the facility, especially during the hottest time of the day, consider outings to locations such as libraries, museums, malls, or other public spaces where the indoor temperatures are controlled, and the air is filtered.
 - Consider postponing or rescheduling planned outdoor events to a time when the temperature is cooler.
 - Encourage persons in care to tell an employee when they are feeling unwell due to exposure so steps can be taken to mitigate the symptoms and effect. **Important:** Some persons in care 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 individuals will be outdoors. During these times:
 - Avoid sunburn.
 - 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).
 - 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 activity.
 - Wear hats, sunglasses and light-weight, loose fitting clothing.
 - Seek shaded spaces.
 - **Resources:**
 - [Heat Safety \(Interior Health\)](#) - Poster
 - [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 \(Interior Health\)](#)

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.