

EXTREME HEAT INFORMATION FOR COMMUNITY PARTNERS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

[Health Emergency Management BC](#), [First Nations Health Authority](#) and [Island Health](#) have joined together to provide this resource to all of our communities as extreme heat affects us all. During the heat dome event in 2021, 619 people died of heat-related illness in British Columbia, including 48 within Island Health. The [BC Coroners Service](#) reported that 67% of deaths involved those more than 70 years old, and 98% occurred indoors. In 2022, there were another 16 deaths across BC, attributed to the extended period of heat from July 23-Aug 3, followed by a further 3 deaths in 2023.

Importantly, provincial data show that more heat-related deaths occur during early season heat events (May-June) compared to late season events (July-August). **This highlights the importance of preparing early.**

In 2022, the BC [Heat Alert Response System \(BC HARS\)](#) launched to alert the public of heat risk through an organized communication system. There are two levels of heat alerts:

- [Heat Warning](#) → Daytime high-nighttime low-daytime high temperatures of 29°-16°-29°C for the Southwest Region and 28°-13°-28°C for the Northwest Region (see pg. 14 of the [BC HARS](#)).
- [Extreme Heat Emergency](#) → Heat warning criteria have been met and temperatures are forecasted to continue increasing for three or more consecutive days.

Please see the [BC HARS](#) for specific recommended actions for **Local Authorities and Indigenous Communities**, as well as **NGOs and Partner Organizations**.

THOSE MOST VULNERABLE TO EXTREME HEAT ARE PEOPLE WHO:

Live alone or are socially isolated	Are chronically ill (i.e., heart disease, diabetes)
Are over 65 years of age	Use substances or take specific medications
Are materially or socially deprived	Work outdoors or in hot environments
Live with a disability or reduced mobility	Live with mental illness (e.g., schizophrenia , depression, anxiety)
Have a cognitive impairment	Are infants, young children or pregnant

SIGNS, SYMPTOMS, AND RECOMMENDED ACTIONS FOR HEAT-RELATED ILLNESS

Mild to Moderate Heat-related Illness	Severe Heat-related Illness
Heavy sweating, headache, muscle cramps, extreme, thirst, dark urine	High body temperature, confusion, dizziness/fainting and flushed skin with no sweating
If these symptoms develop, seek a cooler environment, drink plenty of water and use water to cool your body. Wear a wet shirt or apply damp towels to cool your skin.	This is a medical emergency – call 911. While waiting for help, cool the person right away by moving them to a cool place, if you can; apply cold water to large areas of the skin.

HealthLink BC: [Beat the Heat resource](#) and online tool for [Heat-related illnesses: Check your symptoms](#)

HOW TO PREPARE FOR HEAT EVENTS:

- **Maintain situational awareness** among your team by subscribing to heat alerts through the [WeatherCAN app](#); set up [custom notifications](#) for staff as necessary.
- **Create, review or update your health outreach plans** geared toward vulnerable and high-risk populations that you support. This may involve:
 - Developing or adopting resources on heat and health, including print and online resources.
 - Training staff and volunteers on how to help individuals during extreme heat events using resources such as the NCCEH's [Health Checks During Extreme Heat Events](#), available in five languages. This tool was developed by heat health experts to help non-healthcare professionals identify and respond to heat-related illness.
 - Specific resources have been developed for [service providers](#) who work with people living with [schizophrenia](#) or those [who use substances](#).
 - Community members who are eligible for Community Health Services can receive support for heat-related illness through [Island Health Community Virtual Care](#).
 - Encourage community members to check on neighbours.
 - Encourage community members to stay cool at home by preparing their own [Cool Kit](#).
- Encourage at-risk community members to apply for **BC Hydro's [Free AC Program](#)**. This program provides a free portable AC unit to people based on age, income level and home health referrals.
- **Plan ahead for cooling centres:**
 - Identify public air-conditioned buildings, including community centres, libraries and swimming pools that could be utilized as cooling centres.
 - Consider factors such as accessibility, hours, appropriate space, and distance to facilitate attendance for high-risk or vulnerable populations.
 - Consider using heat-mapping tools to identify areas within the community where cooling is needed most. Heat-mapping tools are listed in the Resources section below.
 - Research has identified a number of ways to encourage cooling center attendance:
 - Provide ample seating, especially for older adults;
 - Incorporate programming, activities or amenities that encourage socializing;
 - Actively promote cooling centers and in multiple languages, as appropriate;
 - Seek to counter the common misperception that cooling centres are intended for unhoused populations.

WHAT TO DO DURING A HEAT WARNING OR HEAT EMERGENCY:

- Activate heat response and communication plans at the appropriate level and update your organization's website and social media page with consistent heat health messaging.
- Focus community outreach on susceptible or high-risk populations and groups that support them.
- Publicize the location of cooling shelters and other cooling assets (spray parks, misting stations, and drinking water fountains) via various media sources, including print and public signage.
 - Municipalities and community organizations are strongly encouraged to update the locations and hours of cooling centres on [EmergencyInfoBC.ca](#).

- Explore options for coordinating free public transport with local providers to access cooling centres.
- Consider extending the hours of operation of pre-existing cool public spaces and reducing the cost of access to those spaces (e.g., swimming pools).
- Consider distributing water to at-risk populations while outdoors (e.g., portable water stations).
- Consider adjusting work schedules to cooler times of the day.
- Encourage local services, sports teams, clubs and organizations to reschedule services or major events to cooler times of the day, particularly for outdoor events or venues without air conditioning.
- Monitor local weather conditions at [Environment Canada](#).

COOLING STRATEGIES TO LESSEN INDOOR TEMPERATURES:

- Get an easy-to-read thermometer to track indoor temperature.
- Turn on air-conditioning units, or consider installing air-conditioning units. [Fans alone](#) cannot effectively lower core body temperature at temperatures over 35°C, especially for older adults.
- Shade windows from the outside, if safe to do so.
- Close windows and pull indoor shades by 10 a.m. to trap cooler air inside.
- Open windows and doors around 8 p.m. to let in cooler overnight air (check that outside temperatures are below inside temperatures).

INDOOR TEMPERATURE GUIDE:

Indoor environments may be **most dangerous overnight, especially for individuals who live alone**. If you are a susceptible individual and you have no way to cool the inside of your home, relocate to another cooler location or outside.

- Sustained exposure to temperatures **26°C and below is safe**.
- Sustained exposure to temperatures **26°C to 31°C may pose a risk to the most vulnerable**.
- Sustained exposure to temperatures **over 31°C should be avoided for vulnerable populations** whenever possible. If they cannot be avoided, monitoring of the environment (thermometers) and the individual (heart rate) should be considered. In both cases, values that increase rather than remain stable indicate danger.

DUAL WILDFIRE SMOKE AND EXTREME HEAT EVENT

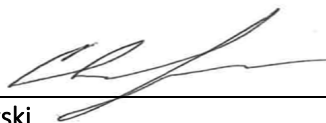
Overheating is usually a bigger risk to health than smoke inhalation. Many people are at risk of potential severe injury and death if they overheat, while a much smaller proportion are at risk of severe acute respiratory or cardiovascular attack. Individuals most at risk from smoke are also at risk from heat, and their risks may be compounding. Therefore, most people should prioritize staying as cool as possible in very hot weather.

Seek cooler, cleaner indoor air – at home if possible, and elsewhere if not. The public can identify their nearest cooling shelter on the [EmergencyInfo BC map](#).

Working together to protect the public's health,



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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Resources for individual preparedness:

- Island Health webpages on [Heat Safety](#) and [Sun Protection](#) and [Extreme Heat Poster](#)
- [Prepared BC's Extreme Heat Preparedness Guide](#) (Government of BC)
- [Three Steps to Cost-Effective Apartment and Condo Heat Protection](#) (INTACT Centre)
- [Three Steps to Cost-Effective Home Heat Protection](#) (INTACT Centre)

Resources for Service Providers and Landlords

- [Prepare for Extreme Heat: A Guide for Service Providers](#) (BCCDC Harm Reduction)
- [What to do During Extreme Heat: Guide for Service Providers](#) (BCCDC Harm Reduction)
- [Irreversible Extreme Heat: Protecting Canadians & Communities from a Lethal Future](#) (INTACT Centre)
- [Creating Cooling Spaces During Hot Weather](#) (Vancouver Coastal Health)
- [Community Care Facilities and Heat](#) (Vancouver Coastal Health)
- [Extreme heat preparedness social media package](#) (EMCR)
- [Summer heat and health: Recommended actions for owners and managers of rental and/or strata housing](#) (Fraser Health)

Heat mapping tools

- [Capital Region Extreme Heat Information Portal](#) (Capital Regional District)
- [Mapping the Vulnerability and Exposure to Extreme Heat Waves of Populations Living in Housing in Canadian Communities](#) (Laval University)
- [HealthyPlan.City](#) (Canadian Urban Environmental Health Research Consortium)

CONTACT US

Island Health's [Health Protection and Environmental Services Locations](#)
Or email Health Emergency Management BC at hembc@islandhealth.ca