

## Extreme heat information for community partners and local governments

[Health Emergency Management BC](#), [First Nations Health Authority](#), [Métis Nation British Columbia](#) and [Island Health](#) have joined to create this list of health recommendations, resources and tools to support communities coping with extreme heat. These resources and recommendations are intended to complement ongoing heat preparedness activities.

During the heat dome event in 2021, 619 people died of heat-related illness, including 55 within Island Health. The [BC Coroners Service](#) reported that 67 per cent of deaths involved those more than 70 years old, and 98 per cent occurred indoors. In 2022, there were another 16 deaths across B.C., attributed to the extended period of heat from July 23 to Aug. 3, followed by a further three deaths in 2023. Importantly, provincial data show that more heat-related deaths occur during early season 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 \(HARS\)](#) was launched to alert the public of heat risk through an organized communication system. There are two levels of heat alert:

- [Heat Warning](#) → Daytime high / nighttime low / daytime high temperatures of 29 C / 16 C / 29 C
- [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 recommended actions for **Local Authorities and Indigenous Communities**, as well as the section for **NGOs and Partner Organizations**.

**Table 1. Populations most susceptible to extreme heat**

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

Community members who are eligible for [Community Health Services](#) can receive support for heat-related illness through [Island Health Community Virtual Care](#).

**Table 2. 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.	<b>This is a medical emergency – call 911.</b> 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](#)

## Health recommendations for heat preparedness

- **Maintain situational awareness** among your team by subscribing to heat alerts through the [WeatherCAN app](#); set up [custom notifications](#) for staff as necessary.
- **Explore strategies to support populations at high risk of heat impacts (Table 1).** This may involve:
  - Targeted messaging on heat and health, including print and online resources and via community networks (e.g., seniors organizations, service providers, etc).
  - Encouraging community members to check on neighbours (e.g., a heat buddy system).
  - Training staff and volunteers to check on individuals during extreme heat events using resources such as the NCCEH’s [Health Checks during Extreme Heat Events](#), available in English, French, Punjabi, and traditional and simplified Chinese. This tool was developed by heat health experts to help non-professionals identify and respond to heat-related illness through in-person or telephone check-ins.
  - Socializing resources that have been developed for [service providers](#) who work with people living with [schizophrenia](#) or those [who use substances](#).
  - Considering a campaign to prepare and distribute home heat-preparedness resources (e.g., [Cool Kits](#)), with adaptation for local needs and cultural appropriateness.
- **Recommendations for establishing cooling centres:**
  - Free heat-mapping tools (e.g., [Capital Region Heat Portal](#), [University of Laval Mapping Tool](#), [HealthyPlan.City](#) tool) may help identify areas where cooling is needed most.
  - Ideally, a cooling centre should be in well-known, accessible, transit-connected, public air-conditioned buildings (e.g., community centres, libraries and swimming pools). However, if no indoor air-conditioned spaces are available, consider setting up outdoor shade, drinking water fountains or misting stations (using potable water) in places where people congregate (e.g., popular parks, city streets, spray parks, near to other popular amenities).
  - [Research](#) has identified several ways to encourage cooling centre attendance:
    - Provide ample seating, especially for older adults.
    - Incorporate programming, activities or amenities (Wi-Fi) that encourage socializing or entertainment.

- Counter common misperceptions that cooling centres are intended for unhoused populations only or are unhygienic.
    - Publicize the location of cooling shelters and other cooling assets (spray parks, misting stations, drinking water fountains) via various media sources, including print and public signage, and in multiple languages (where appropriate).
    - Explore options for coordinating free public transport 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).
  - Municipalities and community organizations are strongly encouraged to update the locations and hours of cooling centres on [EmergencyInfoBC.ca](https://www25.gov.bc.ca/emergencyinfo).
- **During a Heat Warning or Extreme Heat Event**, it may also be necessary to:
  - Adjust work schedules to cooler parts of the day, as appropriate for the location and type of work.
  - 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.

## Strategies to promote heat resilience at home

- Encourage community members to get an indoor thermometer to track temperatures at home.
- Shade windows from the outside if possible.
- Close and shade windows by 10 a.m. to trap cooler air inside. Then, open windows and doors in the evening to let in cooler air (check that outside temperatures are below inside temperatures).
- [Fans alone](#) cannot effectively lower core body temperature when indoor temperatures are above 35 C, especially for older adults.
- Encourage community members to prepare their own personal heat plan based on Prepared BC's [Heat Preparedness Guide](#) and/or create a cool space in their homes where they can also sleep during hot nights.
  - Island Health has developed a complementary two-pager entitled [How to protect yourself from heat](#) to provide additional health advice for wildfire smoke resilience. This can be printed and distributed to community members

## Indoor temperature guidance

Indoor temperatures peak around 9 p.m. and may climb day over day if the heat event continues. The [BC HARS](#) makes the following recommendations on indoor temperatures:

- 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 susceptible.**
- Sustained exposure to temperatures **over 31 C should be avoided for susceptible populations** whenever possible.

People who are susceptible to heat and are experiencing sustained elevated indoor temperatures with no options to cool the space should consider **relocating** to a cooler, safe location. If sustained exposure to temperatures > 31 C cannot be avoided (e.g., person cannot leave the home), it may be necessary to monitor the environment (thermometers) and the individual (heart rate). In both cases, values that increase rather than remain stable indicate danger.

## **Coping with dual wildfire smoke and extreme heat events**

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 [EmergencyInfoBC map](#).

*We recognize and appreciate the tireless efforts of local governments, Indigenous Governing Bodies and communities who have worked diligently over the years to protect their communities from the harmful impacts of extreme heat. Your dedication to safeguarding health and well-being is invaluable.*



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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### Resources for individual preparedness:

- Island Health webpages on [Heat Safety](#) / [Sun Protection](#) and [Extreme Heat Poster](#)
- [Prepared BC's Extreme Heat Preparedness Guide](#) (Government of B.C.)
- [Three Steps to Cost-Effective Apartment and Condo Heat Protection](#) (INTACT Centre)
- [Three Steps to Cost-Effective Home Heat Protection](#) (INTACT Centre)
- Métis Nation of British Columbia's [Emergency Information](#) page and Métis Crisis line at 1-833-Metis-BC (1-833-638-4722).

### 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 [Health Protection and Environmental Services Locations](#)

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