EXTREME HEAT INFORMATION FOR COMMUNITY HEALTH PARTNERS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

Health Emergency Management BC, First Nations Health Authority and Island Health have partnered to provide this resource to all of our communities as extreme heat affects us all. Our region had 55 heat-related deaths from June 25 - July 1, 2021. The Coroners Service reported 98% of deaths occurred indoors and 67% were among those 70 years or older. In 2022, there were another 16 deaths, across BC, attributed to the extended period of heat from July 23 to August 3rd.

A two-tier BC Heat Alert Response System (HARS) was launched in 2022 to alert the public of heat risk through an organized communication system. The two tiers are: Heat Warning and Extreme Heat Emergency. The purpose of a HARS is to increase community resilience to extreme heat and develop the most effective actions to reduce heat-health risks, especially for those most vulnerable.

Follow local heat alerts through the WeatherCAN app.

THOSE MOST VULNERABLE TO EXTREME HEAT **People who:**	
live alone	are chronically ill (i.e. heart disease, diabetes)
are socially isolated	use substances
are materially and socially deprived	work outdoors
are insecurely housed	have mental illness (i.e. mood disorders schizophrenia)

SIGNS OF HEAT-RELATED ILLNESS

Heat Exhaustion	**Heat Stroke**
Heavy sweating, headache, muscle cramps,extreme thirst, dark urine	High body temperature, confusion,dizziness/fainting and flushed skin with no sweating
If 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	Heat stroke 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; applying cold water to large areas of the skin

HealthLink BC: Beat the Heat resource and online tool for Heat related illnesses: Check your symptoms

POTENTIAL ACTIONS TO PREPARE FOR HEAT EVENTS:

- Prepare a heat response plan
- Prepare community heat health messages, including print and online resources
- Ensure all relevant staff subscribe to receive heat alerts
- Identify relevant information sources for your clients who may be at risk of extreme heat
- Where able carry out a vulnerability assessment identifying those most susceptible to heat-related illness
- Create/review/update your heat health outreach plans geared towards vulnerable and high-risk populations that you support
- Train staff/and volunteers on what to do to protect individuals during extreme heat events

- Create/check contingency planning for air-conditioning and power supply in your buildings
- Keep a list of public air-conditioned buildings, including community centres, libraries and swimming pools that could be utilized as cooling centres
- Assess locations of cooling centres (for accessibility, hours, appropriate space for high-risk or vulnerable populations)
- Consider the feasibility and appropriateness of other types of communal gathering spaces (including shaded outdoor spaces) that could be utilized as a cooling space

POTENTIAL ACTIONS DURING A HEAT WARNING:

- Activate heat response and communication plans for a heat warning event
- Undertake community outreach focusing on susceptible and high-risk populations and groups that support them
- Publicize cooling shelter information through all feasible media sources
- Explore options for coordinating free transport with local public transport provider for accessing cooling shelters
- Consider extending hours of operation of pre-existing cool public spaces and reducing the cost of accessing cool spaces (e.g. swimming pools)
- Consider distributing water to at-risk populations outdoors (e.g. portable water stations) and share information on locations of public water fountains
- Update your organizations website and social media page with consistent heat health messaging
- Consider adjusting 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 relevant for outdoor events or venues without air conditioning
- Monitor local weather conditions at Environment Canada

COOLING STRATEGIES TO LESSEN INDOOR TEMPERATURES:

- Fans alone cannot effectively lower core body temperature, especially for older adults
- Turn on air-conditioning units, or consider installing air-conditioning units
- Shade windows from the outside
- Close windows and pull indoor shades by 10 am to trap cooler air inside
- Open windows and doors around 8 pm to let cooler overnight air in (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 generally a greater immediate 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.Therefore, most people should prioritize staying as cool as possible in very hot weather. Both heat and smoke are important environmental exposures and their risks may be compounding when they co-occur. Seek cooler, cleaner indoor air – at home if possible, and elsewhere if not (such as shopping centres or community clean air / cooling centres).

RESOURCES

Irreversible Extreme Heat: Protecting Canadians and Communities from a Lethal Future
BCCDC Heat Event Response Planning

NCCEH: Health Checks during Extreme Heat Events

Prepared BC's Extreme Heat Preparedness Guide

Community Virtual Care - Island Health

https://www.intactcentreclimateadaptation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/IntactCentre-Three_steps-Apartment_Heat_Protection.pdf

House Heat Protection - University of Waterloo

CONTACT US

Environmental Public Health Office Sites
https://www.islandhealth.ca/our-locations/health-protection-environmental-services-locations

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