

camh Heat Wave Response

Information for patients and families



July 2025

Across the country, Canadians are feeling the impacts of climate change and extreme heat events. It is important to know how you can protect yourself and your family and friends from heat-related illnesses and emergencies.



Who is at risk?

Some factors can make you more vulnerable to the risks and effects of heat, such as:

Age



- Older people (60+ years) can have a tougher time dealing with heat and humidity. The temperature does not have to be high to put them at risk for a heat-related illness.
- Older adults with age-related mental health issues and/or a history of falls will often face more risks due to isolation.
- Children and youth often experience more anxiety and hopelessness (climate distress) than older populations.

Pregnancy

- Higher temperatures can affect parental and fetal health and cause preterm birth.

History of mental health problems

- People with mental health problems may be more isolated and may have more barriers to reducing the risks of heat exposure (e.g., lack of access to air conditioning).



Medical history

- Having certain health conditions—like asthma, diabetes, heart disease, a past heat-related illness, being sick, low fitness or difficulty with mobility—can make it easier to get sick from the heat.

Medications



- Some medications, such as antidepressants, antipsychotics and mood stabilizers, can cause side-effects that are worsened during heat waves. These may include:
 - nausea/vomiting
 - dizziness/fainting
 - sweating
 - diarrhea or constipation
 - headache
 - dry mouth
 - feeling very thirsty
 - dry skin/skin rash
- If you are taking these medications, talk to your doctor about ways to reduce your risk during a heat wave.

Substance use

- Substance use can make it harder to notice the signs of overheating and heat-related illnesses.
- Alcohol use increases the risk of dehydration.
- Some substances (e.g., cocaine, methamphetamines, MDMA) increase body temperature and heart rate.



People with disabilities

- People with disabilities face unique challenges in adapting to heat extremes.
- They are more likely to face poverty-related risks.
- They are often overlooked in response plans.

Social and physical environment

- Some living conditions can put people at risk for illness during a heat wave (e.g., lack of housing, housing without air conditioning or ventilation, or less access to shade, water or cool spaces).
- Racialized communities are more exposed and may have less access to resources.



Heat wave action plan: Essential steps to stay safe

The following guidelines and actions can help keep you and your family and friends safe during a heat wave. Take action to protect yourself from heat-related sickness when the temperature rises to 30 degrees Celsius (30 °C) or above. For older adults, people with medical conditions and those who are unhoused or living in unstable housing conditions, action should be taken when the temperature reaches 25 degrees Celsius (25 °C).



Protect yourself



- Stay indoors during the hottest parts of the day, especially from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Plan essential outdoor activities for the cooler times of the day and do not take part in intense physical activities.
- Always take water with you when you go out.
- Bring an umbrella when you go out and look for shaded areas to protect yourself from the sun.
- Wear lightweight, loose-fitting and light-coloured clothing. Do not wear multiple layers.
- Apply sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher before heading outdoors. Wear sunglasses and a hat.
- If you work in a hot environment, take regular breaks and talk to your employer and coworkers about ways to reduce heat exposure.

Stay cool



- Close the blinds or draw the curtains during the hottest parts of the day. Keep the windows shut until it is cooler outside than inside. In the evenings, open the windows to let the cool air in.
- If you have air conditioning but your family or friends do not, invite them to your place to cool off.
- If you don't have an air conditioner, some programs, like Ontario Works (OW) or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), will cover the cost of one. Ask your health care team or case worker about options.
- Go to a cooling centre, library, mall or other place with air conditioning during the hottest parts of the day. If you are in Toronto, you can find a list of locations by going to www.toronto.ca and searching "cool spaces near you."
- Take cool and refreshing showers or baths multiple times a day.
- Limit the use of appliances that make heat, such as the stove, oven, clothes dryer, television, light fixtures, etc.
- Sleep in the coolest room of the house or the basement. Make sure the area is set up for comfort and has easy access to water and a washroom.
- **Did you know? Fans are not effective in lowering your body temperature. When your home is too hot, prioritize air conditioning or getting to a cooler location.**

Talk with your doctor, nurse and/or pharmacist

- Check with your doctor if you are following a diet with restricted fluids. Your doctor may need to adjust your fluid intake during hot weather.
- Certain medications can affect the body's ability to regulate body temperature or can increase skin sensitivity from sun exposure.
- Heat can damage some medications if not stored properly.
- Consult your doctor or pharmacist to find out if any medications you are taking or any of your health conditions may increase your risk in hot weather.
- **Did you know? Heat may worsen some medication side effects.**

Stay hydrated



- Drink 8-12 glasses of fluids every day. You can get your fluids from water, cold soup/broth and fruits and vegetables that have a high water content (e.g., melons and strawberries).
- Avoid alcoholic beverages, as they cause dehydration.
- **Did you know? Hydration is important but needs to be paired with other strategies that lower body temperature.**

Stay connected and check in with those at risk



- Stay in touch with your friends and family every day to update them on your well-being.
- Be attentive to your own and others' well-being, especially children, older adults and sick people, and provide help if necessary.
- Keep an eye out for heat alerts and follow the advice provided by Environment Canada or your local public health authority.
- **Take hyperthermia (also known as overheating) seriously. If someone is showing signs of heat stroke (i.e., confused, hot, dry or sweating profusely, muscle cramps, rash, fainting or unconscious, seizure), call 911 immediately.**
- Remind your friends and family who might be in danger or who might be sensitive to heat to take cool baths, rest in the coolest part of their home, stay with friends and follow all of the guidance above.

Appendix A: Personal heat preparedness plan

Check the boxes below as you prepare for a heat event, and review the heatwave **DOs** and **DON'Ts**. If you are unable to take any of the actions below on your own, ask for help from a friend, family member or support person.



Preparing for the heat event

- ☐ Check for heat alerts
- ☐ Fill out your [Heat preparedness plan: Personal and emergency information](#)
- ☐ Set up a cool living and sleeping area
- ☐ Plan your schedule to avoid going outside
- ☐ Check windows and air-conditioning are working
- ☐ Get groceries in advance
- ☐ Fill medication prescriptions
- ☐ Stock up on clean drinking water

Heatwave DOs

- ☐ Contact friends and family regularly
- ☐ Block out the sun with window blinds
- ☐ Monitor the temperature in your home
- ☐ Stay hydrated
- ☐ Get to a cooler location if needed
- ☐ Keep taking any medication as prescribed

Heatwave DON'Ts

- ☒ Go outside in the daytime
- ☒ Use the oven or stove to cook
- ☒ Use alcohol and non-prescription drugs
- ☒ Wear layers or tight, heavy clothing
- ☒ Use a fan in temperatures above 33°C
- ☒ Engage in unnecessary physical activity or non-urgent chores in hot spaces
- ☒ Ignore signs of heat illness

Heat preparedness plan: Personal and emergency information

Keep this information with you in case of an emergency. You, a medical professional or a support person may need to access it quickly.

Name:

Medications:

Health Conditions:

Allergies:

Who can I call for help and support?

Name:

Name:

Phone:

Phone:

Address:

Address:

Where can I go if it is too hot at home?

Place:

Place:

Address:

Address:

Directions/transport:

Local crisis hotline: