HEAT INFORMATION FOR FIRST NATIONS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Health Emergency Management BC, **First Nations Health Authority** and **Vancouver Coastal Health** have joined together to provide this resource to communities across the region as extreme heat affects us all. During the heat dome in 2021, 619 people died of heat-related illness in British Columbia, including 145 within Vancouver Coastal Health. A report from the BC Coroners Service found that 98% of heat-related deaths occurred indoors and 56% were people who lived alone. Hot indoor spaces pose the greatest risk during heat events and every community may have homes that become dangerously hot due to building design (e.g. large windows) or neighbourhood features (e.g. lack of green space).

Importantly, provincial data shows 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.

The BC Heat Alert Response System (BC HARS) alerts the public of heat risk with two levels of heat alert:

- 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. 8 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 Indigenous communities, as well as Local Authorities, NGOs, and partner organizations.

THOSE MOST VULNERABLE TO EXTREME HEAT ARE PEOPLE WHO:

Are over 60 years of age	Are chronically ill (i.e., heart disease, diabetes)
Use substances, including alcohol, or take specific medications	Live with mental illness (e.g., schizophrenia, depression, anxiety)
Live alone or are socially isolated	Live with a disability or reduced mobility
Are experiencing homelessness or marginal housing	Work or live in hot environments
Are Pregnant	Are infants or young children

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

Heat exhaustion	Heat stroke
Heavy sweating, headache, muscle cramps, extreme thirst, dark urine, trouble concentrating, feel dizzy, feel sick or throw up, skin rash, rapid breathing and heartbeat.	High body temperature, drowsy or fainting, confused, less coordinated, very hot and red skin.
Help them seek a cooler environment, drink plenty of water and cool their body with ice packs, wet towels or damp clothes. If symptoms get worse or don't improve, seek medical attention.	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

- Subscribe to heat alerts through the WeatherCAN app.
- Create, review or update your health outreach plans geared toward heat-vulnerable individuals that you support. This may involve:
    - Sharing resources on heat and health, including print and online resources. PreparedBC has social media packages and free print resources can be ordered from PREPAREDBC@gov.bc.ca.
    - Training staff and volunteers on how to help individuals during extreme heat events using resources such as the Vancouver Coastal Health Heat Check-In Support Framework for Community Organizations and training videos.
    - Encourage community members to check on neighbours. The NCCEH's Health Checks During Extreme Heat Events was developed by health experts to explain how to check-in with someone to see if they need help during a heat event (available in 5 languages).
    - Encourage community members to stay cool at home by preparing their own Cool Kit.
    - Additional resources can be found on the VCH Extreme Heat webpage (see links below).
- 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 using community engagement to identify areas within the community where cooling is needed most and what is needed to ensure the centre will be accessible.
    - 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 only intended for unhoused populations.
    - Additional information is available in Creating Cooling Spaces During Hot Weather.

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 (see above for resources from PreparedBC).
- Focus community outreach to heat-vulnerable populations and groups that support them.
- Publicize the location of cooling spaces and other cooling assets (spray parks, misting stations, water fountains, etc.) 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 heat-vulnerable populations 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 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 for people at higher risk from heat.
- Shade or cover 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 in the evening, especially for individuals who live alone.

- 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 can be dangerous and should be avoided for vulnerable populations. If not, monitor the indoor temperature (thermometers) and the individual (signs of heat-related illness). If in doubt, support them to go to a cooler space.

COMBINED 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. Individuals most at risk from smoke are also at risk from heat, and these risks may add to one another. 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 by contacting or checking the social media account for their Nation, municipality, or regional district. Some communities also use the EmergencyInfo BC map.

Working together to protect the public's health,

Dr. Patricia Daly, MD, FRCPC
Chief Medical Health Officer
Vancouver Coastal Health

Kim Brooks
VP, Regional Operations - Vancouver Coastal
First Nations Health Authority

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Health Emergency Management BC

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Resources for individual preparedness:

- Vancouver Coastal Health Extreme Heat webpage with public translated resources.
- Stay Safe During Extreme Heat Events (First Nations Health Authority)
- Be Prepared For Hot Weather (First Nations Health Authority)
- Prepared BC's Extreme Heat Preparedness Guide (Government of BC)
- Fans in Extreme Heat FAQ (VCH/ FH)

Resources for Service Providers and Building Owners/ Operators

- 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)
- 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, smoke and health: Recommended actions for owners and managers of rental and/or strata housing (Vancouver Coastal Health)
- Heat Stress Webpage (WorkSafe BC)

Heat mapping tools

- HealthyPlan.City (Canadian Urban Environmental Health Research Consortium)

CONTACT US

Please reach out to any of the three organizations using the email addresses below.

- First Nations Health Authority:
  - Emma Lee Emma.Lee@fnha.ca – Manager, Regional Health Emergency Management
  - Azreer Gill Azreer.Gill@fnha.ca – Manager, Regional Environmental Health
- Vancouver Coastal Health's Healthy Environments and Climate Change team: healthy.environments@vch.ca
- Health Emergency Management BC: hembc.lm@phsa.ca