

# COMMUNITY CARE FACILITIES & HEAT

## Why should I pay attention to heat?

Extreme heat can trigger a variety of heat-related illnesses including dehydration, heat exhaustion and **heat stroke**, a **medical emergency** that can lead to permanent disability or death.

Licensed community care facilities serve many of the populations most at risk for heat-related illness, such as:

- Older adults, aged 60 years or older
- People with pre-existing health conditions, such as diabetes, heart or respiratory disease
- People with mental illness, such as schizophrenia, depression and anxiety
- People with substance use disorders, including alcohol
- People with limited mobility
- Young children



### Signs of heat exhaustion:

- New skin rash
- Heavy sweating
- Dizziness
- Nausea or vomiting
- Rapid breathing & heartbeat
- Headache
- Difficulty concentrating
- Muscle cramps
- Extreme thirst
- Dark urine & decreased urination

**If possible, move them to a cool space. Give them water to drink. Loosen or remove clothing. Cool their body with water, e.g. wet their clothes, apply wet towels, provide a cool sponge bath or shower. Continue cooling and hydration until symptoms resolve. If symptoms do not resolve or progress to signs of heat stroke call 911.**

### Signs of heat stroke:

- High body temperature above 39°C (102°F)
- Fainting or decreased consciousness
- Confusion
- Lack of coordination
- Very hot and red skin

**HEAT STROKE IS A MEDICAL EMERGENCY  
CALL 911 OR SEEK MEDICAL ATTENTION.**

**If possible, move them to a cool space. Loosen or remove clothing. Quickly begin cooling their body with cool water, e.g. wet their clothes, apply wet towels, provide a cool sponge bath or shower. Continue applying cool water and watch them until 911 or medical personal arrive.**

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## What can I do to **prepare for the heat season?**

- It is recommended that community care facilities expand their emergency plan to include a **plan to respond to extreme heat** (see page 5 for more details).
- **Prepare staff** to recognize the signs of heat-related illness and dangerous indoor temperatures.
- Have medical staff **pre-identify residents** who may be at higher risk for heat-related illness.
- Know where to get **official weather information on heat alerts**.
  - [Environment Canada Public Weather Alerts for British Columbia](#)
  - [Environment Canada WeatherCAN App](#)
- Learn about ways to **keep the building cool** during the summer. Some examples include:
  - Install exterior window shading or glazing to reduce sun penetration into the indoor space.
  - Plant trees on the side of the building, where the sun hits the building during the hottest part of the day, and use trees to create shade outdoors.
  - Contact a professional to install a green roof on the building.
  - Ideally, temperatures should remain below 26°C (78°F) indoors, especially for residents at higher risk from heat-related illness. If passive cooling (e.g. outdoor shading or glazing, closing blinds, opening windows and using fans to bring outdoor air in overnight) is not enough to keep your building comfortable, consider installing an energy efficient active cooling system (i.e. heat pump or air conditioning) to be used on hot days.
  - If the entire facility cannot be cooled below 26°C (78°F), consider creating a specific cooling room with air conditioning where residents can cool off on hot days.
  - If the building has air conditioning, make sure it works properly before the hot weather starts.
- **Look up nearby cool spaces** to take residents for a few hours a day during extreme heat events (e.g. a public library, community center, shaded park, etc.).



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## What should I do during a heat alert?

- Check the latest **heat alert information** and weather forecast.
- **Inform all staff teams, residents and families/ friends** when heat alerts are declared and where to find health guidance.
- **Pay close attention to how residents feel and check for signs of heat-related illness.** Provide staff with clear protocols on what to monitor, such as frequency of checks, signs of heat-related illness and actions to take, especially for non-medical staff. Consider activating dedicated heat response staff to monitor residents, indoor temperatures and provide interventions so it is not missed if regular staff are busy or unclear who is responsible.
- **Review** Heat Related Illnesses: Prevention and Management in Long-Term Care with care staff (see Resources).
- **Provide and encourage additional fluids** around the clock, particularly water, juices, and popsicles. Consider activities to promote hydration, such as a smoothie social.
- **Keep residents and the building cool:**
  - Keep shades and blinds closed during the day to block the sun.
  - If you don't have air conditioning, close windows around 10:00am to trap the cooler air inside and open windows and doors around 08:00pm to let the cooler overnight air in.
  - Use multiple fans strategically to help move cooler air into the space overnight, if possible.
  - Adopt cooler menu items with higher water content, such as salads and fruits. Avoid meals that require the oven to be on.
  - Make sure residents and staff are dressed for the weather with loose fitting, light-coloured and breathable clothing.
  - Remove excess blankets and bedding from resident's beds.
  - Reschedule outdoor activities to cooler times of the day and avoid activities where residents will be in direct sun or heat.
  - If the building is hot:
    - Give residents a break from the heat by ensuring they spend at least two hours at a time in a cool space, but ideally as much time as possible (e.g. rooms below 26°C, community center, library, tree-shaded outdoor area).
    - Use water to help residents cool off (e.g. cool shower or foot bath, apply cool water or wet towels to the skin or have the residents wear wet shirts).
- **Note:** Fans may not effectively reduce body temperatures or prevent heat-related illness in people at higher risk from heat. Do not rely on fans as the primary cooling method, especially during an Extreme Heat Emergency.





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## Indoor temperature thresholds and actions

- **When updating your heat response plan, consider having temperature actions, for example:**
  - Standard measures to maintain normal indoor temperatures and prevent indoor temperatures from exceeding 26°C (78°F).
  - Escalated measures to take if there is a likelihood of indoor temperatures approaching or exceeding 26°C (78°F).
  - Emergency measures to take if the indoor temperature exceeds 26°C (78°F).
- **To implement temperature based actions, daily monitoring of the indoor temperature will be required. The following information provides guidance on how to get the most reliable measurements:**
  - The larger the facility, the more measurements we recommend taking. We recommend having a minimum of three different locations throughout the building, and more for larger facilities.
    - At least one of these temperatures should be recorded in a common room.
    - At least one of these temperatures should be recorded in a resident bedroom that is expected to experience a high heat burden (for example, a south facing room on the upper-most level).
  - Measure the temperature at least once a day under routine measures and twice a day for escalated and emergency measures. Indoor temperature should be measured in the evening, when indoor temperatures are expected to be at their daily maximum.
- **Implementation of the site's emergency heat response measures if the observed indoor temperature exceeds 26°C (78°F)**
- A protocol for reporting to your VCH Licensing Officer if your facility is unable to maintain a temperature below 26°C (78°F) in resident rooms or a shared cooling room that all residents can access.

## Heat events and wildfire smoke

Wildfire smoke and heat events can often **occur at the same time**. Overheating is **more dangerous** than smoke exposure for most people at risk. **Cool and clean indoor air** is the best way to protect from negative health impacts. See resources for additional steps to take during smoke events.



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## Do I need a heat plan?

Under the [Residential Care Regulation](#), licensed care facilities are responsible for maintaining a safe environment for people in their care, including safe indoor temperatures. Heat plans explain how a facility will maintain a safe environment and are applicable to:

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|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Long term care</li><li>• Assisted living</li><li>• Community living</li><li>• Hospice</li></ul> | Community Care Facilities for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mental health</li><li>• Substance use</li><li>• Acquired injury</li><li>• Child and youth</li></ul> |
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## How do I develop a heat plan?

These resources were developed by Vancouver Coastal Health and Health Emergency Management BC for long-term care and assisted living facilities but they are **word documents that can easily be modified** for use by other licensed community care facilities.



**Find these resources** at the bottom of the VCH Heat Webpage, under Extreme Heat Resources: [Businesses and Licensed Facilities tab](#).

### Resources to develop a heat plan:

- **Resource Guide: Heat Planning:** How to start heat planning and recommended months for each step.
- **Heat Response Plan Template:** Fillable template
- **Site Assessment Checklist:** Detailed site and clinical checklists to assist in planning.



### Resources for yearly heat preparedness:

- **Resident Risk Identification Guidance:** Criteria to identify residents at highest risk from heat.
- **Heat Response Preparation Checklist:** Brief checklist to complete before each heat season

### Resources for Heat Response:

- **Heat Response Temperature Log:** Temperature recording template to modify for use in your facility
- **Heat Response Checklist:** Daily readiness check during a heat alert.



**If you are encountering challenges developing a heat plan or modifying the templates above to your setting, please contact your VCH Licensing Officer to inquire about additional resources.**

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## Heat Resources

<a href="#"><u>Online Weather Alerts for BC (ECCC)</u></a>	Online weather alerts. Environment and Climate Change Canada is the weather source used by government, emergency management and the health system.
<a href="#"><u>WeatherCAN App (ECCC)</u></a>	Cell phone notifications from for weather alerts issued for your saved locations. Environment and Climate Change Canada App.
<a href="#"><u>Health Facilities Preparation for Extreme Heat (Health Canada)</u></a>	Recommendations for effective health facility management to protect staff and patients.
<a href="#"><u>Acute Care During Extreme Heat (Health Canada)</u></a>	Recommendations and Information for Health Care Workers
<a href="#"><u>Community Care During Extreme Heat (Health Canada)</u></a>	Fact sheet for Health Care Workers working in the community and in patient/client homes.
<a href="#"><u>Heat Related Illnesses: Prevention and Management in Long-Term Care (VCH and Providence Health)</u></a>	Decision Support Tool for care staff that outlines how to prevent and manage heat-related illnesses: heat exhaustion and heat stroke.
<a href="#"><u>Extreme Heat Webpage (Vancouver Coastal Health)</u></a>	Information for the public, community partners and health professionals regarding extreme heat, including a number of links to <b>translated</b> factsheets and resources
<a href="#"><u>Extreme Heat Poster (Vancouver Coastal Health)</u></a>	A poster describing heat-related illness and actions to take during a heat event <b>(translated)</b> .
<a href="#"><u>Wildfire Smoke Webpage (BC Centre for Disease Control)</u></a>	Resources for wildfire smoke, including people at risk, health impacts, recommended actions and what to do when there is smoke and heat at the same time.
<a href="#"><u>Heat Resources for Buildings and Tenants (BC Housing)</u></a>	Resources for managing heat in facilities and buildings. Resources to share with tenants, including wellness check-in cards to post on tenant's doors.
<a href="#"><u>Fans in Extreme Heat FAQ (Fraser Health Authority)</u></a>	Fans should not be used as the primary source of cooling for susceptible people in hot indoor environments. Learn how to effectively use fans.
<a href="#"><u>Harm Reduction and Heat (Towards the Heart)</u></a>	See resource list under Harm Reduction: Extreme Weather Events. Information for people who use substances, people with schizophrenia and service providers.
<a href="#"><u>Cool Kits (Vancouver Coastal Health and City of Vancouver)</u></a>	How to make a Cool Kit: Everyday items to cool the body during heat events <b>(translated)</b> .
<a href="#"><u>Extreme Heat Preparedness Guide (PreparedBC)</u></a>	Plain language guide on how to plan for heat season and what to do during a heat event <b>(translated)</b> .
<a href="#"><u>Staying Healthy in the Heat Infographics (Health Canada)</u></a>	Three 1-page cartoon <b>infographics</b> : "Signs and Symptoms", "Who's at Risk" and "Safety Tips"