

EXTREME HEAT INFORMATION FOR COMMUNITY HEALTH PARTNERS AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS:

[Health Emergency Management BC](#), [First Nations Health Authority](#) and [Island Health](#) have joined together 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 heat dome [overwhelmed](#) BC Emergency Health Services, emergency rooms and the BC Coroners Service. The [Coroners Service reported](#) that 67% of deaths involved those more than 70 years old, and 98% occurred indoors.

A two-tiered [BC Heat Alert Response System \(HARS\)](#) is being 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 ultimate objective of a HARS is to increase community resilience to extreme heat and develop actions that are most effective in reducing heat-health risks, especially for those who are most vulnerable.

You can follow heat alerts through the [WeatherCAN app](#).

THOSE MOST VULNERABLE TO EXTREME HEAT:

Those who have:	Older people who live alone
Mental illness	People who are socially isolated
Chronic illnesses, such as heart disease, diabetes	People who use substances
	People who are materially and socially deprived
	People who are insecurely housed

SIGNS OF HEAT-RELATED ILLNESS

Heat Exhaustion	Heat Stroke
Heavy sweating, headache, muscle cramps, extreme, thirst, dark urine Heat related symptoms	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.	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 and train staff/and volunteers on what to do to protect individuals during extreme heat events
- Prepare community heat health messages, including print and online resources
- Create/Check contingency planning for air-conditioning and power supply in your buildings

- Where able carry out a [vulnerability assessment](#) identifying those most susceptible to heat-related illness
- 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)
- Create/review/update your heat health outreach plans geared towards vulnerable and high-risk populations that you support
- Ensure all relevant staff subscribe to receive heat health alerts
- Identify relevant information sources for your clients who may be at risk of extreme heat

POTENTIAL ACTIONS DURING AN EXTREME HEAT EMERGENCY:

- Activate heat response and communication plans
- Encourage/provide wellness checks for people at high risk of severe outcomes
- Consider establishing overnight cooling centers, temporary cooling spaces (e.g. adding temporary air conditioning to existing spaces, setting up outdoor cooling stations in close proximity to highly vulnerable client populations), extending hours of operation of pre-existing cool public spaces to support vulnerable populations, and reducing the cost of accessing cool spaces (e.g. swimming pools)
- Share local cooling shelter information through all feasible formal and informal communications
- Explore options for coordinating free transport with local public transport provider for accessing cooling shelters
- Consider distributing water to at-risk populations outdoors (e.g. portable water stations) and share information on locations of public water fountains
- Update websites and social media pages with consistent community messages and heat health information or messaging
- Encourage local services, 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
- Reschedule any non-essential events, meetings and services to another day, or to a cooler part of the day. Particularly relevant for outdoor events or venues without air conditioning
- Consider adjusting work schedules to cooler parts of the day as appropriate for the location and type of work
- 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 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. 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.

RESOURCES

[Irreversible Extreme Heat: Protecting Canadians and Communities from a Lethal Future](#)

[BCCDC Heat Event Response Planning](#)

NCCEH Wellness Check Document

[Prepared BC's Extreme Heat Preparedness Guide](#)

CONTACT US

Health Protection and Environmental Services Office Sites

<https://www.islandhealth.ca/our-locations/health-protection-environmental-services-locations>



Brennan Macdonald
Vice President, Regional Operations
Vancouver Island Region
First Nations Health Authority



Gerry Delorme
Director of Provincial Operations
HEMBC
Provincial Health Services Authority



Murray Fyfe MD, MSc, FRCPC
Interim VP Population and Public Health &
Chief Medical Health Officer
Island Health