

Heat Health Messages for the Public During a Heat Event

A Resource for Municipal and Community Partners

Extreme heat events are becoming more frequent, severe, and prolonged due to climate change. Municipal and community partners play a key role in informing the public about heat health risks before and during these events.



This document offers key messages that municipal and community partners can use or adapt to inform the public **DURING** heat events. These messages may need to be adjusted for different communities or groups. For any questions about heat health messages, contact the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU).

Things to communicate to the public **DURING** an extreme heat event

- Share information about the extreme heat event to keep the public informed of the situation. Draw from email notifications received from SMDHU or Environment and Climate Change Canada.
- Provide information about community resources available to support individuals to stay safe from the heat. For example share information about the location, hours and accessibility of cooling centres, splash pads, public pools/beaches.
- Share heat health protection key messages.
- Share additional resources with appropriate audiences.

Key heat health protection messages for the public **DURING** an extreme heat event

The following key messages are for use when communicating with the general public during extreme heat events:

- Hot temperatures (inside or outside) can cause [health illnesses](#). Heat illness is preventable by keeping “Aware, Cool, and Connected”.
- Hot temperatures and early summer heat can be especially dangerous because our bodies haven’t gotten used to the heat yet.
- While high temperatures can affect everyone, certain groups are at greater risk of heat-related illnesses due to factors like exposure, sensitivity, or ability to cope with the heat. These groups include:
 - Older adults
 - Infants and young children
 - Pregnant people
 - People living with chronic illnesses (e.g., lung, heart, kidney diseases), mental illnesses (e.g., schizophrenia), and physical or cognitive impairment (e.g., dementia).
 - People who live alone, or who experience social isolation
 - People with limited or no access to cooled indoor spaces
 - People living with lower socioeconomic status, such as those living with lower income or experiencing housing insecurity.
 - People who work in the heat (indoors or outdoors)
 - People who exercise in the heat (indoors or outdoors)

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- **Indoor temperatures** of 31°C or higher are very dangerous to your health, especially for people who are more sensitive to heat. To stay safe, keep indoor temperatures below 26°C. Indoor temperatures usually get hottest in the evening, especially in places without air conditioning.
- Hot temperatures and humid air can lead to poor air quality or overlap with [wildfire smoke](#) events. Check the [Air Quality Health Index \(AQHI\)](#) for your location and follow its recommendations to stay healthy and safe. Extreme heat is usually more dangerous than short-term exposure to poor air quality, so you should prioritize staying cool if you must choose.

Follow these tips to keep aware, cool and connected:

Keep Aware:

- **Check weather forecasts and heat warnings** to know when to protect yourself. Use the [WeatherCAN app](#) or call [Hello-Weather](#) (1-833-794-3556).
- **Monitor for [signs and symptoms of heat illness](#).**

Early signs of heat illness (heat exhaustion, heat cramps, and heat rash) include:

- Feeling dizzy or faint
- Feeling like you might throw up
- Having a headache
- Breathing fast and heart beating quickly
- Feeling very thirsty
- Peeing less with very dark yellow urine
- Acting differently (for kids)
- Having muscle cramps
- Getting a rash on your skin

If you or someone else feels these symptoms when it's hot out, go to a cool place, cool down your body (like putting wet clothes on or using an ice pack), and drink water.

Emergency signs of heat illness (heat stroke) include:

- High body temperature
- Stopped sweating, but very hot, red skin
- Feeling confused or having trouble moving right
- Passing out or losing consciousness.

Heat stroke is a medical emergency. Call 911 if someone experiences these signs.

While waiting for help, move to a cool space, cool the body (e.g., apply water to clothes, ice pack to body) and drink water.

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Keep Cool Bodies:

- **Drink lots of water** before you feel thirsty (your body needs water to sweat and cool itself).
- **Get into the water.** Take a cool shower/bath, go for a swim, put your feet in water or apply a damp towel to your skin.
- **Dress for the weather.** Wear loose-fitting, light-coloured clothing, a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses.
- **Take a break from the heat.** Spend time in cool places (e.g., in air-conditioned spaces or shaded parks with lots of trees or water features). Reduce your activity levels and take breaks. When outside, stay in the shade.
- **Sleep in the coolest room** in your space.

Keep Cool Spaces:

- **Keep your space cool:**
 - Use air conditioning if you have it
 - Use a fan to circulate air during cooler parts of the day
 - Shut windows and doors if indoor temperatures are comfortable
 - Block the sun with curtains, blinds and awnings during the day
 - Open windows at night to let cooler air inside
 - Make meals that don't need to be cooked in the oven
- **Go to a cool place:**
 - If you do not have air conditioning, find somewhere with air conditioning, especially if you are at increased risk of heat illness.
 - **Contact your local municipality or visit their website** for hours and locations of cooling spaces or go to a cooler public place like a library, shopping mall, or swimming pool.

Keep Connected (Check-in on Others):

- **Check-in** on neighbours, friends and family (in person or virtually) especially those at greater risk of heat illness, to make sure they are cool and hydrated. Use the [heat check-in resource](#) (available in 5 languages):
 - Check and respond to signs of heat-related illness
 - Measure body and room temperature and help them keep their bodies and spaces cool. If indoor temperatures are too hot, help them access cooler spaces
- It is especially important to connect in the mornings and evenings (when indoor temperatures are highest).

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Additional Resources

- Please refer to SMDHU's website (www.smdhu.org/heat) and social media for up-to-date information regarding heat warning notification and for more heat-health information and tips on how to stay cool and protected. Health Canada has [additional information on heat and health](#).
- Call Health Connection at (705) 721-7520 or 1-877-721-7520 to speak with a health professional.
- Contact your local municipality or visit their website for hours and locations of cooling spaces.

Please share the above with your networks as needed.

Additional Communications Materials for the General Public

- [Infographic: Staying healthy in the heat](#)
- [Video: Staying healthy in the heat](#)
- [Infographic: Three ways to protect you and your loved ones during an extreme heat event](#)
- [Brochure: Older adults](#)
- [Brochure: Children](#)
- [Brochure: Active in the heat](#)