



Summer Heat Safety for Seniors and People with Medical Conditions

How can extreme heat affect my health?

Extreme heat can affect your health in a number of ways. It can cause heat-related illnesses such as heat exhaustion and heat stroke. It can worsen any existing health conditions. In extreme situations, it can result in permanent disability or death.

Who is more likely to have problems and why?

The people more likely to have problems with extreme heat are:

- older adults
- people without air conditioning
- people who don't leave their home often because of mobility, social anxiety, or other challenges
- people with chronic health conditions such as kidney, heart, or lung disease

During extreme heat, our bodies work hard to keep us cool. This effort can put added strain on the body when a person has a medical condition, making the medical condition worse. As we get older, our bodies might not sense that we are overheating. For these reasons, we need to pay extra attention.

Some medicines can interfere with your body's natural ability to get rid of heat, increasing the chances of overheating and dehydration. The sun and heat has a stronger effect on your body if you take any of these types of medicines:

- angiotensin-converting-enzyme (ACE) inhibitors
- anticholinergics for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), urinary incontinence, or overactive bladder
- beta blockers
- calcium channel blockers
- diuretics
- vasoconstrictors
- medicines for mental health such as antidepressants, anxiolytics, phenothiazines, lithium, antipsychotics, benzodiazepines, etc.

If you take any of these types of medicines, ask your doctor or pharmacist how you can prevent stronger effects during extreme heat.

What can I do to stay safe?

Before the heat season

- Make a plan for checking in with family or friends each day during days of extreme heat.
- Consider getting heat-reducing window coverings or awnings. If possible, install air conditioning or a heat pump. There might be government rebates for cooling systems.

During extreme heat

- Stay up-to-date - weather can change quickly.
 - Tune in to local weather forecasts and alerts.
 - Use a weather app like WeatherCAN.
 - Check with your city for cooling centre locations.
- Keep your home cool, between 22°C and 26°C.
 - Try to limit how much you use your oven or stove.
 - Keep windows and curtains or blinds closed.
 - Place a fan in front of an open window when it is cooler outside than inside to pull cool air in.
- Drink more water, even when you do not feel thirsty. Leave a glass by the sink as a reminder.
- Stay in the coolest part of your home.
- Take lukewarm baths to cool down. Even footbaths can help.
- If you have a window air conditioner, place in a room you can close off from the rest of your home. Use the room as your cool space.

If it is 31°C or higher indoors, this is dangerous.

- Go somewhere that is cooler.
Examples:
 - the home of a friend with a basement
 - the home of family with air conditioning
 - a shaded park
 - a pool
 - cooling centre in your community

Did you know?

Fans cannot lower your body temperature or prevent heat illnesses. Never rely on fans as the only way to cool your home during extreme heat.

Temperatures inside stay higher longer than outside, exposing you to extreme heat for longer.

You need to spend a few hours in a cool place to lower your body temperature. When in a cool place only for a short time, you might feel cooler on the outside but your body has not yet cooled down on the inside. There is still a chance you could get a heat illness.

What are the signs of heat illness?

The signs depend on how hot the body is and how long the body has been hot.

Heat exhaustion and heat stroke are severe signs of heat illness.

Early signs of heat stress:

- stinging, itchy skin, sometimes called “prickly heat”
- red rash
- muscle spasms

Signs of heat exhaustion:

- heavy sweating
- cool skin
- feeling dizzy or faint
- feeling sick or throwing up
- fast heart beat and breathing
- headache
- trouble concentrating
- muscle cramps or pain
- extreme thirst
- very dark urine and going less often

Signs of heat stroke:

- high body temperature
- very hot, red, and dry skin
- feeling very dizzy or fainting
- confused
- less coordinated

Extreme heat and looking after those most vulnerable

Before the heat season

- Make sure they have a thermometer in their home.
- Help them create a cool space in their home where they can stay cool if temperatures rise.
- If they do not have a cool space in their home:
 - Make a plan for them to stay with family or friends.
 - Find an air-conditioned spot close by where they can go to and cool off for a few hours during hot days.

During extreme heat

- Check on the senior at least 2 times a day.
- Try to see the senior in-person at least once a day.
- Suggest drinking lots of water.
- Suggest taking lukewarm baths often.
- Ask yourself:
 - *Are they drinking enough water?*
 - *Do they know how to keep cool?*
 - *Do they have access to a cool place or air conditioning?*
 - *Do they show any signs of heat illness?*

Anytime someone shows signs of heat illness:

- Try to move the person to a cool place.
- Give them plenty of water.
- Cool the skin down with water or place the person in cool water.
- **Call 9-1-1 or take the person to the nearest Emergency Department** if they are having a medical emergency including signs of heat stroke.

For more information on heat safety, visit [fraserhealth.ca/heatsafety](https://www.fraserhealth.ca/heatsafety).