



**PLEASE COPY FOR ALL
PHYSICIANS
IN YOUR OFFICE**

*From the Office of the
Medical Health Officer*
June 24, 2021

The heat season is having an early start this year and the temperature forecast from Environment Canada indicates Western Canada will be facing above normal temperatures this summer. A Heat Warning has been issued for the coming weekend, with projected temperatures up to 10 C higher than typical for this time of year.

Summer heat can pose serious health risks for patients, especially those living alone or who are vulnerably housed.

Signs of heat illness

Heat stress related illness can include heat rash, heat cramps, heat syncope, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke, and most seriously can result in death.

Signs of heat illness may include changes in behaviour, dizziness or fainting, nausea or vomiting, headache, fast breathing or heartbeat, heavy perspiration or hot/dry skin, extreme thirst and decreased urination. Severe signs of illness requiring immediate medical care include a high body temperature, confusion, hallucinations, lack of coordination, seizures, or a loss of consciousness. Some patients may also be more prone to suicidal ideation during extreme heat events.

Patients most at risk

Patients at highest risk include:

- Seniors, infants and young children
- Those with chronic disease (hypertension, heart conditions, respiratory disease, diabetes, obesity, kidney disease)
- People with mental illness, neurological diseases and/or psychoactive substance use (e.g. dementia, depression, schizophrenia, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's)
- Patients on certain medications, including antihistamines, anti-depressants, antiadrenergics, beta-blockers, anticholinergics, diuretics, antipsychotics, and anti-Parkinson drugs. These medications can impair ability to respond to heat.
- People experiencing certain living conditions (social isolation, reduced income, malnutrition, precarious housing or homelessness, reduced access to cooling options)
- Those with reduced ability for self-care or are who are confined to bed
- Outdoor workers

Supporting patients and families

Your patients can benefit from making plans of how to adapt to extreme heat. This might include:

- **Education and Awareness:** Learning the signs of heat illness. Monitoring heat advisories/heat alerts
- **Activity Modification:** Scheduling outdoor activities during the coolest parts of the day or postponing strenuous activity. Staying well hydrated in advance of thirst.
- **Environmental Modification:** If homebound without air-conditioning, blocking sun with blinds, using fans and misting clothing or skin with cool water. Finding cool places such as air-conditioned public buildings, swimming pools/showers/baths, cooling centres, or shaded green spaces
- **Supporting others:** When possible, checking in on family, friends and neighbours

The Fraser Health Medical Health Officers are available for medical consultations at 604-587-3828 or 1-877-342-6467 (M-F, 0830-1630 hrs) or after hours at 604-527-4806.

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For particularly vulnerable patients (ie with risk factors above), advise patients' families to check on them twice a day during hot days and ask the **Caretaker Checklist**:

- Are they drinking enough water?
- Do they have access to air conditioning?
- Do they know how to keep cool?
- Do they show any signs of heat stress?

Understanding heat advisories

Special Weather Statements are issued by Environment Canada when high temperatures are expected for at least two days in the region; this is to encourage preparation for heat. **Heat Warnings** are issued by Environment Canada when **critically high temperatures** associated with increased mortality *are forecasted*; the public is recommended to take protective actions. **Extreme Heat Alerts** are issued by local health authorities when such **critically high temperatures are reached** and are expected to continue.

Resources you can share with your patients:

- [Staying Healthy in the Heat fact sheets \(Health Canada\)](#)
 - Parents: [Keep children cool! Protect your child from extreme heat](#)
 - Athletes: [You're active in the heat. You're at risk! Protect yourself from extreme heat](#)
 - Seniors: [It's way too hot! Protect yourself from extreme heat](#)
- [Beat the Heat B.C.](#) (HealthLinkBC)
- Fraser Health [Extreme Heat Webpage](#)

Other risks associated with heat

Hot temperatures increase the risks that windows are opened and left unsecured, **posing a risk for falls for young children**. 132 children were treated at trauma centres around the province after falling from a window or balcony from 2010-2016.

Parents can be counseled that *screens do not prevent children from falling through* open windows and recommended to move furniture away from windows, install window guards on windows above ground level, or fasten windows so they cannot be opened more than 10 cm.

Resources you can share with your patients:

- [Child Safety: Preventing Falls](#) (HealthLinkBC)

Learn more about responding to extreme heat, by visiting Health Canada's [Extreme Heat Events Guidelines](#) for health care workers.

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