

Summer Heat

Keeping children safe while in your care

Now is the time for Child Care Providers to review your summer plans for sun exposure, mosquitoes and ticks, water sports and high temperatures. This article focuses on high temperatures.

While the most severe health effects happen at very high temperatures, problems can occur at temperatures as low as 20°C. Extreme heat can be dangerous for all children but especially infants and young children. Over-exposure to heat or over-exertion in the heat can cause a variety of symptoms and can even be fatal. Symptoms include changes in behaviour (sleepiness or temper tantrums), dizziness or fainting, nausea or vomiting, headache, rapid breathing and heartbeat, extreme thirst and decreased urination with unusually dark yellow urine. Heat can also cause heat edema (swelling of the hands, feet and ankles), heat rash (prickly heat) and heat cramps (muscle cramps). The most serious situation is heat stroke with its symptoms of high body temperature, confusion or unconsciousness and no sweating.

Here are some tips to prevent, recognize and respond to hot weather – related problems. ^{1 2}

1. Prepare for hot weather

- Learn how to keep your child care facility cool. Planting trees on the side of the building where the sun hits during the hottest part of the day can reduce the temperature by as much as 5°C.
- Have at least one air-conditioned room where you can take the children for relief from the heat for at least several hours a day. This is the most important protective measure you can take.
- If you do not have an air conditioner, find an air-conditioned spot where you can take the children to cool off for a few hours a day during extreme heat.
- Do not rely on fans at higher temperatures (~ 30 °C). If you are using a fan, keep it at a safe distance from the children and aim the air flow in their direction.
- Monitor local weather forecasts and alerts so you know when to take extra care.



¹ Keep children cool! Protect Your Child from Extreme Heat, Health Canada brochure 2011-11-03. www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/pubs/climat/heat-children_chaleur-enfants/index-eng.php

² Heat-related illness. HealthLink BC File #35, September 2011. www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/hfile35.stm

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2. Keep the children cool

- Block the sun by closing awnings, curtains or blinds during the day.
- Open windows at night to let in cooler air.
- Dress children in loose-fitting, light-coloured clothing made from a breathable fabric.
- Keep children in the shade and have them wear wide-brimmed, breathable hats.
- Plan outdoor activities for cooler parts of the day or move them to cooler indoor places.
- Never leave children inside a vehicle. When the outside air temperature is 23°C, the temperature inside a vehicle can be more than 50°C which is extremely dangerous.
- If your child care facility is hot, take the children to a cool place for at least a few hours each day.

3. Keep the children hydrated

Give the children plenty of cool liquids, especially water, even before they tell you they are thirsty.

4. Watch the children closely

Children most at risk of heat-related health problems include those with breathing difficulties (asthma), heart conditions, kidney problems, mental and physical disabilities, developmental disorders and diarrhea. Ask the parents of children who are taking medications to ask their doctors or pharmacists if their medications increase the risk of heat-related problems and, if so, what to do about it.



5. Respond quickly if you see problems

Stay alert for symptoms of heat illness. If you see any of these signs, immediately move the child to a cool place and give the child some water to drink.

Heat stroke is a medical emergency! If one of the children in your care has a high body temperature and is confused, unconscious or has stopped sweating, call 911 immediately. While waiting for help, cool the child by moving him/her to a cool place, applying cold water to large areas of the skin or clothing and fanning the child as much as possible.

6. Other summer-related things to think about

- Sun exposure – If sun exposure can't be avoided, protect children with wide-brimmed, breathable hats and a sunscreen that is SPF 30 or higher. Sunscreen will protect against the sun's ultraviolet (UV) rays but not from the heat. Don't apply sunscreen to a child less than six months of age. Sunscreen and insect repellents can be used safely together. Apply the sunscreen first, then the insect repellent. Just remember you need parents consent to apply sunscreen and insect repellent; www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/hfile26.stm
- Mosquitoes and ticks – If you are in an area where mosquitoes are active and/or ticks are present, cover up and protect uncovered skin with insect repellent and follow the manufacturer's directions. www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/hfile96.stm; www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthfiles/hfile01.stm
- Air quality - Before heading out, check the Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) www.bcairquality.ca/readings/aqhi.xml. Children are more sensitive to air pollution which tends to be worse during extreme heat. www.bc.lung.ca/airquality/airquality_primer.html – A Guide to Air Quality Information for the Public.

If you have any questions contact the Licensing Officer assigned to your facility or visit the Fraser Health website at: www.fraserhealth.ca/childcare