

July 3, 2024

Heat & Smoke Guidance for Business Leaders

Extreme heat and our health

Our health region generally has moderate temperatures. However, as the climate warms, extreme heat will become more common. Exposure to heat can lead to heat exhaustion and heat stroke, as well as worsening of pre-existing health conditions. Dangerously hot conditions can lead to permanent disability or death. We are also seeing wildfire smoke more often, which can have negative health impacts on your patrons and staff.

Businesses can play an important part in helping to reduce heat and smoke-related illness within our communities. The following guidance is to support businesses in taking actions to support and to contribute to safe and healthy communities, both routinely and during emergencies. We thank the business community for their contributions.

Who is at risk

People who are elderly, those with chronic illness (particularly heart, lung, and kidney disease) and those with mental health challenges may be at higher risk. This is partly due to how their bodies are working, and partly due to some of the medications they may be taking which change how the body responds to sun and heat.

People who live in older buildings without air conditioning and people who don't leave home regularly are also at higher risk due to heat; having a safe cool space is important for susceptible community members, but many may not have somewhere close by to go. **If your business is able to allow people to cool off, it could be a lifeline.**

Wildfire smoke events can occur at the same time as heat events. Smoke events worsen air quality in communities from hours to weeks. For most people, heat is a bigger health concern than smoke. Helping people spend time in cool, and where possible, clean air spaces is important.

What are the signs of heat illness?

- Dizziness/fainting
- Nausea/vomiting
- Rapid breathing and heartbeat
- Extreme thirst
- Decreased urination with unusually dark urine
- Confusion or changes in behavior
- High body temperature
- Lack of coordination

If someone is struggling with heat illness, try to move them to a cool place, apply cool water to their skin and call 9-1-1.

What can you do as a business owner?

Tune in regularly to local weather forecasts and alerts so you know when risk is higher. Apps like [WeatherCAN](#) may be helpful to get alerts when weather warnings are issued. You can also subscribe to [Metro Vancouver](#) for air quality alerts.

Heat Warnings occurs when temperatures are expected to rise to 29°C (Vancouver) or 33°C (Abbotsford) or above for 2 days or more and do not fall significantly at night. There is a 5% increase in deaths during a heat warning.

Extreme Heat Emergency happens when there is a heat warning, and the temperatures are expected to get hotter for 3 days or more. There is a 20% increase in deaths during an extreme heat emergency.

Make small changes in your business to protect the public during heat/smoke events:

- Provide water.
- Train staff and volunteers to recognize the [signs of heat illness](#). Put up posters with advice on how to cool off and how to care for other people.
- Let people stay longer than usual if you have air conditioning. Advertise so people know they can stay. **Note:** It can take a long time for people to cool off once they are overheated.
- Allow people to bring their [pets](#) so that they don't worry about leaving pets in hot homes.
- Be aware of [Extreme Heat Guidance for Food Establishments](#)
- During smoke events, create clean air spaces by running higher efficiency filters in the ventilation system of your building, or using portable air cleaners (or [homemade box fan air filters](#)).

How can staff be protected?

- Please see WorkSafeBC resources for more comprehensive guidance.
- Know the signs of [heat illness](#) and educate staff to be alert if staff/patrons show symptoms. Where possible, post heat and smoke guidance in easy to see places.
- Keep your business cool, somewhere between 22°C and 26°C, which can provide your staff with needed relief. **If it is 31°C or higher inside, it is dangerously hot for susceptible people.**
- Where possible, allow changes in work hours so staff who might be exposed to the heat can do their work during the coolest hours of the day.
- Increase breaks and encourage staff to drink plenty of water.

For more information, email healthybuiltenvironment@fraserhealth.ca or visit fraserhealth.ca/climate