

Summer Heat and Health: Recommended Actions for Owners and Managers of Rental and/or Strata Housing

Extreme Heat and Your Health

Extreme heat can cause health impacts resulting in heat-related illnesses such as heat exhaustion and heat stroke and worsen pre-existing health conditions. In extreme situations, this can lead to permanent disability or death. As the climate warms extreme heat events will be becoming more common in the summer and can be particularly impactful when they occur early in the season.

Who is at risk and what are the risk factors

During the 2021 heat dome, a large portion of the people we lost were socially isolated people living in their homes throughout our communities. Some of these people also had limited connection to the healthcare system.

People who live in buildings without air conditioning are often most at risk because heat can accumulate indoors day after day during extreme heat events. When temperatures reach 31 degrees or higher, it can be especially dangerous. It may also be difficult for people to find other cool places to stay.

People who are elderly are at more risk than others because they may not notice that they are feeling thirsty or their body temperature is increasing. This is additionally concerning for those without anyone to check on them.

What barriers are there to staying cool?

We understand that owners and managers of rental housing and/or stratas could have concerns about residents installing air conditioning or other cooling measures, sometimes due to aesthetics, safety, or concerns about power usage and building capacity. Some housing in strata buildings are subject to bylaws that prohibit installation of air conditioners and/or awnings or window coverings that can block out the worst of the summer heat. Some rental housing contracts also prohibit the use of air conditioning and certain window coverings.

What are Health Authorities Recommending?

Owners and managers of rental housing can make lifesaving decisions.

In advance of the heat season, we are asking owners and managers of rental and/or strata housing to consider reducing any barriers, operationally or otherwise that would prevent residents from keeping cool. If these barriers exist in rental contracts, we ask that you to remove the barriers and advertise to tenants of this change. We ask that those who own a strata unit to investigate if there are any strata bylaws that prohibit cooling measures, and encourage the strata council to change them.

If a Heat Warning or Extreme Heat Emergency is called, Health Authorities and Environment Climate Change Canada will inform the media; weather warnings are also available through apps such as WeatherCAN.

As cost of cooling measures may be prohibitive for some residents, we also recommend that multi-unit buildings open up a cool, air conditioned common room, where possible, during such heat events. Cool

17/6/22

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green outdoor spaces could also be used or identified as places people can seek refuge. Ahead of such events, it may be advantageous to investigate bulk buying programs for cooling units and/or window coverings.

Furthermore, sharing information with residents about checking on potentially isolated neighbours and how to stay healthy during the heat would help keep all our neighbours keep well. Information on how to conduct check-ins is available through Regional Health Authorities.

We are here to help

For more information to share with your residents and partners, please see <http://www.Fraserhealth.ca/heatsafety> or www.vch.ca/climatechange.
For more guidance please contact healthybuiltenvironment@fraserhealth.ca or healthy.environments@vch.ca.