

EXTREME HEAT PREPAREDNESS

SUMMER HEAT, SMOKE AND HEALTH: RECOMMENDED ACTIONS FOR OWNERS AND MANAGERS OF RENTAL AND/OR STRATA HOUSING

Extreme heat and your health

Extreme heat events, or heat waves, can cause heat-related illnesses such as heat exhaustion and heat stroke, and can impact pre-existing health conditions. In extreme situations, this can lead to permanent disability or death. As the climate warms, extreme heat events will become more common in the summer.

Who is at risk and what are the risk factors?

During the 2021 heat dome, a large portion of the people who died lived alone in the community. Some of these people also had limited connection to the healthcare system.

People who live in buildings without air conditioning are most at risk because heat can accumulate indoors day after day during extreme heat events. Indoor temperatures of 31° Celsius or higher are especially dangerous. Indoor temperatures can also remain high late into the evening as well as for days after a heat event, even after temperatures have dropped outside. 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 are less physically able to control their body temperature and they don't notice thirst or high body temperature as easily. The body's temperature regulation abilities decrease with age and also can be disrupted by certain medications. Similarly, people with mental health concerns, particularly schizophrenia, are at higher risk. This is additionally concerning for those who lack social connections, with no one around to check on them.

What barriers are there to staying cool?

Owners and managers of rental housing and/or stratas may have concerns about residents installing air conditioning or implementing other cooling measures, sometimes due to aesthetics, safety, or concerns about power usage. Some housing in strata buildings is 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 and strata 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 that would prevent residents from keeping cool. If these barriers are in rental contracts, we ask that you remove the barriers and advertise these changes to tenants. We ask those who own a strata unit to investigate if there are any strata bylaws that prohibit cooling measures, and if they exist, to encourage the strata council to change them.

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Furthermore, Health Authorities encourage owners and managers of buildings to:

- » Encourage residents to check on potentially isolated neighbours. Resources on how to do a [heat wellness check](#) can be found on the Regional Health Authority websites listed below.



- » Share information and posters on how to stay healthy during the heat. Extreme heat posters and translated materials are available on the Regional Health Authority websites listed below.
- » During heat events, open a cool, air-conditioned common room for residents who cannot afford cooling measures or have mobility challenges. As people often will not leave their pets, make cool rooms pet-friendly if possible. For people at risk to heat, even walking or rolling a few blocks may worsen health conditions so cooling spaces on site may be the only option for these residents to cool down. If this is not possible, encourage seeking refuge at nearby cool green spaces or cooling centres.
- » Share information about nearby cooling centres and spaces. Local government websites or social media accounts often have lists or maps of these cooling resources.

Further considerations

Air Quality: The Lower Mainland is experiencing more frequent and severe wildfire smoke events, as well as other air quality events. Advisories are issued when outdoor air pollution levels are high. Advisories inform

the public of potential health impacts and helpful actions, like staying indoors and postponing outdoor activities. Housing managers are encouraged to:

- » Be aware of and share information on air quality alerts and advisories. You can subscribe to receive [email alerts for advisories](#) issued in your community.
- » Share/ post [resources](#) on the health impacts of smoke and encourage residents to keep windows closed during air quality events.
- » Conduct regular maintenance of HVAC systems.
- » Create temporary cleaner air spaces inside the building. This could include temporarily upgrading HVAC filters to more efficient ones (MERV 13 or higher) and/or purchasing portable HEPA filter air cleaners or using of [home-made filtration devices](#) in shared spaces.

Window Falls in Children: Falls are common during hot weather when windows are used to cool homes. Between 2016-2020, trauma centres across BC admitted 81 children after falling from windows or balconies, often with life-altering consequences. Owners and managers can reduce these injuries by installing window guards or window stops, or permitting residents/tenants to do so.



We are here to help

For more information to share with your residents and partners, please see [Fraserhealth.ca/heatsafety](https://fraserhealth.ca/heatsafety) or [FraserHealth.ca/airquality](https://fraserhealth.ca/airquality) or www.vch.ca/climatechange.

For more guidance, please contact healthybuiltenvironments@fraserhealth.ca or healthy.environments@vch.ca