

Extreme Heat: Schools & Childcare Facilities



Extreme heat (or heatwaves) happen when temperatures are higher than usual, both day and night. Extreme heat can worsen existing conditions. It can also lead to heat exhaustion, which can progress to heat stroke, a severe illness that can be life-threatening.

Children and infants, particularly under 4 years old, are more vulnerable to heat. Risk of illness is higher for those with certain medical conditions, including:

- Asthma or other respiratory conditions
- Diabetes
- Graves' disease

Children that are taking certain medications, such as those for ADHD and those with higher BMI, may also be at higher risk. Healthcare providers should be consulted.

Make sure children can keep cool and drink plenty of water to help prevent heat-related illnesses.

Signs of heat exhaustion:



Change in behaviour (i.e., more tired/fussy)



Nausea, vomiting



Rapid breathing



Peeing less



Dizziness, fainting



Very thirsty



Dizziness, fainting



Leg or stomach cramps

Move to a cool place and give plenty of water. If symptoms do not ease or if they increase, call 9-1-1.

Signs of heat stroke:



Very hot, red skin



Confused



High body temperature



Dizziness, fainting



Less coordinated

Move to a cool place, loosen clothes or remove excess, cool body with water such as sponge bath or shower. Call 9-1-1.

Extreme Heat: Guidance for Schools & Childcare Facilities

Before heat season (starting as early as May)

For all children:

- ☐ Include heat in your emergency plans for children and staff.
 - ☐ Sites should have heat plans for children and staff that include [WorkSafeBC](#) considerations. Research shows plans that protect working-age adults will be protective of children over 4 years old as well.
- ☐ Prepare staff to learn the signs of heat illness.
- ☐ Identify nearby spaces to visit where children can cool off for a few hours a day (e.g., a public library, community center, shaded park). Consider when these spaces could be used and transportation plans.
- ☐ For children with medical conditions or medications, ask caregivers to consult their healthcare provider or a pharmacist to see if their child is at higher risk to heat or wildfire smoke impacts.
- ☐ Consider installing energy-efficient cooling (such as heat pumps).
 - ☐ If an entire facility cannot be cooled, consider creating one or more specific cooling rooms or spaces.
- ☐ Stock up on basic cooling supplies: play sprinklers, indoor thermometers, towels to wet and cool skin, bottles for drinking water and window coverings.
- ☐ Send information about heat, smoke and window safety home with caregivers.
- ☐ Monitor the weather: Download an alert app such as [WeatherCAN](#).



Did you know?

Heat can impact attention and memory and is associated with lower test scores.

When taking children offsite, have the following:

- ☐ Light & loose clothing
- ☐ Hats
- ☐ Sunscreen
- ☐ Cooling packs
- ☐ Water spray bottles
- ☐ Plenty of drinking water



Extreme Heat: Guidance for Schools & Childcare Facilities

During a heat event:

- ☐ Alert staff and consider notifying caregivers of the heat alert.
- ☐ Monitor indoor temperatures. Where possible, keep indoor temperatures below 26°C. Temperatures over 31°C for extended periods are riskier.
- ☐ Consider relocating to a pre-identified cool space if needed.
- ☐ Monitor staff and children closely for signs of heat illness.
- ☐ Provide and encourage children to drink plenty of water.
- ☐ If meals are provided, consider items that have high water content and do not require cooking.

Being active in the heat (particularly during heat events)

Children and youth can be more susceptible to heat because of their activity levels.

- ☐ For all children, when heat alerts are issued, consider moving physical activity inside or reducing intensity.
- ☐ During longer outdoor activities, give children breaks from the heat by ensuring they spend time in a cool place (e.g., air-conditioned room, tree-shaded area).
- ☐ For sporting events, consult [Fraser Health Outdoor Gathering Guidance](#).
- ☐ For young athletes, consider [acclimatization schedules](#) during hotter months.



Did you know?

Fans cannot effectively lower core body temperature and should not be used as the main cooling method in schools or childcare spaces.

Only use fans to help bring cool air into rooms. Do not direct fans directly towards people when indoor temperatures are very high (over 35°C).



Extreme Heat: Guidance for Schools & Childcare Facilities

Windows

- ❑ Install window locks and add [window safety](#) measures to prevent children from falling out of windows.
 - Between 2016-2020, 81 children were admitted to trauma centres after falling from windows.
- ❑ Block sunlight and heat with external window covering, such as awning, shutters or cardboard covered with foil.
- ❑ Close windows and blinds in the morning to keep the cooler air inside and open windows and doors around 8 p.m. to let in cooler air overnight.



Shade and long-term cooling

- ❑ Plant trees on the side of the building where the sun shines during the hottest part of the day and use trees to create shade in outdoor play spaces.
- ❑ Consider installing a green roof on the building.
- ❑ See the BC Cancer [Shade Lookbook](#) for ideas.



Wildfire smoke:

Wildfire smoke and heat can happen together. Make sure that indoor spaces do not get too hot, especially if windows and doors are closed to keep smoky air out. Filter the indoor air where possible. Providing **cooler and cleaner air** is the best way to protect from negative health impacts.



Additional Information:

- **Fraser Health:** Scan barcode to view



[Extreme
Heat Safety](#)



[Window
Safety](#)



[Wildfire
Smoke
Factsheet](#)



[Indoor Air
Quality](#)

- **HealthLink BC:**

[Safety for infants and young children during extreme heat](#)