



Community Care During Extreme Heat

Heat Illness: Prevention and Preliminary Care

This fact sheet is for Health Care Workers working outside of facilities in the community and in patient/client homes.

Heat Illness and High Risk Individuals

Recognizing Risk

Populations most at risk for heat illness and death during extreme heat:

- People who are confined to bed, or have reduced ability for self care
- People with pre-existing conditions have greater risk of heat illnesses. These include cardiovascular, pulmonary, renal and psychiatric conditions.
- People who are alone without a social support network in hot home environments.

Planning for the Summer and Extreme Heat

Knowledge Check and Action Plan for Management and Staff

- Ensure your organization has an updated extreme heat emergency plan.
- Plan to coordinate with other agencies.
- Know your partners and maintain coordination plan with other services during extreme heat.
- Educate and train staff on extreme heat and heat illnesses in the early spring.
- Inform staff about extreme heat emergency plans (e.g. staffing, response to client needs).
- Increase staff awareness of public cooling options (e.g. pools, splash pads, shaded green space, libraries, shopping centres).
- During extreme heat, review key fact sheet information with volunteers and staff.
- During extreme heat, review clinical management of patients and residents most at risk either due to reduced mobility, chronic illnesses (pulmonary, cardiovascular, renal), or certain medications. (*Refer to Health Canada's Acute Care Fact Sheet.*)

Community Care – Assessing for and Educating on Heat Illnesses

Checklist when Visiting Client

URGENT: *If client does not answer the door for a scheduled visit:*

- Notify your office / supervisor
- Attempt to call the client, if there is no answer:
 - Call the client's emergency contacts to request they check on the client
 - Follow any other steps required by your organization

On entering client's home, check how they are coping with the heat.

- Observe home environment
- Do they show physical signs of being in distress?
 - Slower than usual response to answer the door
 - Appearing unwell or complaining of not feeling well
 - Appearing disoriented

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If client is unusually confused and very hot, call 911. This may be heat stroke and is a medical emergency.

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Heat Illness: Prevention and Preliminary Care

Community Care – Assessing for and Educating on Heat Illnesses (Continued)

If client is not in distress, check further on how they are coping with the heat.

- Is client uncomfortable because of the heat?
- Does the client have access to fan, air conditioning, fridge, phone, social support?
- Is client at risk from exposure to extreme heat?
 - Client has mobility, mental and/or physical health issues
 - Client does not have physical and/or mental capability to escape the heat
 - Client lacks access to transportation
 - Client needs help to keep their environment cool, or move to a cooler place?

Is client showing signs of heat illness:

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> extreme thirst | <input type="checkbox"/> headache | <input type="checkbox"/> muscle cramps |
| <input type="checkbox"/> unusual skin colouring | <input type="checkbox"/> fainting | <input type="checkbox"/> decreased urination with unusually dark yellow urine colour |
| <input type="checkbox"/> tiredness | <input type="checkbox"/> nausea | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> weakness | <input type="checkbox"/> vomiting | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> dizziness | <input type="checkbox"/> rapid breathing and heartbeat | |

Actions to Help Clients Avoid Heat Illnesses

- Provide care (or help to coordinate care)
- Educate client (and caregivers) on how to cool themselves
- Inform client of local cooling options and community services to help support the needs of the client
- Provide client with appropriate Health Canada Heat-Health Fact Sheet (for Older Adults, Physically Active and Young Children)

Keeping the Person Cool

- Use cool water to:
 - Sponge or bathe
 - Soak hands, forearms, and/or feet
 - Spray skin while fanning
 - Wet a cloth to put on neck and/or armpits.
- Have Patient/Client:
 - Dress in loose fitting, light-coloured clothing made from breathable fabric (e.g. cotton).
 - Drink liquid (especially water) regularly, even when not thirsty.
 - Eat fruits and vegetables which are high in water content.
 - Have a glass of water in reach – ensure it is beside them before leaving.

Keeping the Home Cool and Food Safe

- Close windows, blinds and curtains during the hottest part of the day.
- Open windows, blinds and curtains when temperature is cooler in the evening.
- Use electric fans, air conditioning, to cool or circulate air.
- If home gets too hot, have client go to public place to cool down (e.g. pool, shaded green space, library, shopping centre). Ideal temperature range is assessed on a case by case basis.
- Do not use the oven. Instead use the stove top or microwave to heat food, or have meals that do not require heating.
- Ensure that food is properly stored as soon as eating has finished, and discard spoiled food. This is particularly important following a power outage.

For additional information refer to Health Canada's Extreme Heat Events Guidelines: Technical Guide for Health Care Workers

For further information email: Climatinfo@hc-sc.gc.ca

For more information in your region: