Heat-related Illness Facts

BC HOUSING

Identifying Who's at risk

Everyone is at risk of heat-related illnesses during extreme temperatures. However, social housing tenants are at increased risk because they often have fewer resources. Groups at higher risk include:

- Older people, infants, young children, and people who are pregnant
- People with **chronic illnesses** (heart, lung, or psychiatric)or that have breathing difficulties
- People who take **certain common medications** or **recreational substances** - these can increase heat sensitivity and/or reduce personal temperature regulation and perception
- People without access to air conditioning or fans
- People living in high-rise apartments, people living alone
- People experiencing homelessness
- People who work in the heat

Types of Illnesses & Responses

Extreme Heat Illnesses

Extreme heat can cause heat-related illnesses, which are the result of your body gaining heat faster than it can cool itself down. It can lead to weakness, disorientation, exhaustion. In severe cases, it can lead to heat stroke or death. Review HealthLink BC's **Beat the Heat** page or the table below to recognize signs, symptoms and learn what to do if you think someone is suffering from a heat-related illness.

	WHAT TO LOOK FOR		WHAT TO DO		
HEAT STROKE	• High body temperature (103°F or higher) • Hot, red, or dry skin • Absence of sweat • Fast, strong pulse • Headache	• Dizziness • Nausea • Confusion • Losing consciousness (passing out)	• Call 911 right away -- heat stroke is a medical emergency • Move the person to a cooler place	• Help lower the person's temperature with cool cloths or a cool bath • **Do not give the person anything to drink**	HEAT STROKE
HEAT EXHAUSTION	• Heavy sweating • Cold, pale, and clammy skin • Fast, weak pulse • Nausea or vomiting • Muscle cramps	• Tiredness or weakness • Dizziness • Headache • Fainting (passing out)	• Move to a cool place • Loosen tight clothes • Put cool, wet cloths on ther person's body • Take a cool bath • Sip water	**Get medical help right away if:** • The person is throwing up • Symptoms get worse • Symptoms last longer than 1 hour	HEAT EXHAUSTION
HEAT CRAMPS	• Heavy sweating during intense exercise	• Muscle pain or spasms	• Stop physical activity and move the person to a cool place • Drink water or a sports drink • Wait for cramps to go away before doing any more physical activity	**Get medical help right away if:** • Cramps last longer than 1 hour • The person is on a low-sodium diet • The person has heart problems	HEAT CRAMPS
HEAT RASH	• Red clusters of small blisters that look like pimples on the skin (often on the neck, chest, groin, or in elbow creases)	• Intense scratching of inflamed skin/blisters	• Keep the rash dry • Don't scratch the rash	• Use powder (like baby powder) to soothe the rash • Apply calamine lotion	HEAT RASH

Poor Air Quality Illnesses

Poor air quality can cause respiratory and eye irritation, shortness of breath, headaches, fatigue, and chest tightness. In extreme situations it can trigger asthma attacks and heart attacks. It can also affect babies in the womb, decrease quality of life, and cause anxiety.

What to do:

- Stay inside with doors and windows closed to reduce air pollution exposure
- Seek medical care for people with difficulty breathing or chest pain

Combined Extreme Heat + Poor Air Quality Exposure

When an extreme heat event and a poor air quality event occur at the same time, **cooling should be prioritized**. Keep people inside for as long as possible by running fans, creating a cooling room, or going to a community cool-air shelter. If those are ineffective or not possible, open windows to create a breeze or go outside to a shady area (like the east side of the building) - extreme heat is more deadly than poor air quality.

Want more information? Check out our **webinar** on Preparing for Extreme Heat and Poor Air Quality.