

Extreme Heat Health Guidelines Information for Long Term Care Homes and Service Providers to the Elderly

The elderly and frail are at high risk during periods of extreme heat. As the body ages, its cooling mechanisms may become impaired. Living alone or being confined to a bed and unable to care for one's self further increases risk. Existing health conditions such as chronic illness, mental impairment, and obesity can also increase an individual's vulnerability. Taking certain medications can affect the body's ability to cool itself and makes a person more susceptible to extreme heat.

What is our role during extreme heat?

PLAN – EDUCATE – HYDRATE – COOL

- Establish an agency policy and plan to deal with extreme heat. Be sure to include back up policy and plans for loss of power and air-conditioning.
- Ensure that staff and volunteers know the signs and symptoms of heat-related illness including dehydration, heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke and know what to do. See Heat-related illness: Know the signs. Know what to do.
- Educate clients/residents about the hazards and risk factors and how to prevent heat-related illness.
- Ensure that clients/residents are well hydrated. Water is the liquid of choice, or if needed pure, diluted fruit juice may be given – no alcoholic or caffeinated drinks. The elderly often have a diminished sense of thirst; encourage them to drink even when not thirsty.
- Keep elderly persons cool and, if possible, in an air-conditioned place. Maintain a comfortable indoor environment. When the indoor temperature of living areas is 32°C (90°F) or higher, urgent measures are needed to correct the situation. Clients /residents must be moved to a cooler area.
- Use fans with caution.
- Time spent outdoors should be limited to the early morning or later afternoon when temperatures and UV radiation are less intense. Some medical conditions may increase sensitivity to the heat.
- Check that wheelchairs, walkers and other metal equipment do not become dangerously hot.
- Ensure heat and sun safety are integral parts of regular outdoor day programming. Wear UV protective sunglasses, a wide-brimmed hat, and loose-fitting, light coloured clothing. Staff should be role models for heat and sun safety behaviours.
- Apply sunscreen (SPF 15 or higher) to clients and residents 20 to 30 minutes before going outside to ensure absorption.
- When using DEET insect repellent, ideally it should be applied 20 to 30 minutes after the sunscreen has been applied.

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- Check regularly on vulnerable clients/residents, during Extreme Heat Health Alert, Warning or Emergency periods.
- Listen and watch for KFL&A Public Health extreme heat health alert and warning notices – on the radio, on the TV or by fax/email to your agency. Post these notices.
- Monitor the weather reports.

During a Heat Alert follow the above guidelines and;

- Activate your agency's policy and plans to deal with extreme heat.
- Check clients/residents, especially those who have physical or mental illnesses, for signs of dehydration and other heat-related illnesses. Follow first aid guidelines.
- Consider reducing time spent outdoors and strenuous outdoor activities. Staff should be present at all outdoor activities.
- Encourage clients/residents to **drink lots of water** or pure, diluted fruit juice. Consult a physician if client/resident is on fluid restrictions.
- Ensure that air-conditioning is in good working order and operating effectively in all rooms. Keep an air-conditioned common room available for residents to visit.
- Advise those residents living independently to keep their living areas cool. If residences are not air-conditioned support clients to visit air-conditioned public places.

During a Heat Warning follow the above and;

- Limit time spent outdoors.
- Suspending all strenuous outdoor activity.
- Assess clients/residents **more frequently** for signs of heat-related illness.
- Advise and if required, facilitate residents living independently to get to air-conditioned locations or cooling centres each day.

During a Heat Emergency follow the above and;

- Listen and watch for KFL&A Public Health Extreme Heat Health alert and warning notices on the radio, on the TV or by fax/email to your service agency. Post these notices.
- **Assess** all clients/residents for heat-related illness every one to two hours, or more frequently.
- Assist residents living independently in non air-conditioned homes to get to designated cooling centres for 2 to 3 hours each day.

For more Health Information:

KFL&A Public Health
www.kflapublichealth.ca
 613-549-1232

Telehealth
 1-866-797-0000

For information on where to stay cool or obtain services:

City of Kingston – 613-546-0000 or www.cityofkingston.ca
 County of Frontenac – 613-548-9400 or www.frontenacounty.ca
 County of Lennox & Addington – 613-354-4883 or www.lennox-addington.on.ca

FS132
 01/06/09