

Extreme Heat Health Guidelines: Protect the Vulnerable! Information for Landlords and Tenants

When the weather gets hot and humid, some people are at risk of heat-related illness and death. This is preventable!

What makes some tenants more vulnerable to heat-related illness and why?

Elderly:

- Often have co-existing chronic, physical and cognitive illnesses that compromise their ability to tolerate extreme heat.
- Often have a diminished sense of thirst, delayed sweat response, decreased number of sweat glands.
- Dementia places elderly at extreme risk of dying from a heat-related illness.

Environmental risk factors:

- Living above the third floor, lack of air-conditioning and living in surrounding air temperature above 32°C (90°F).

Infants (under 1 year of age):

- Have poor sweating mechanisms and rely upon others to regulate the temperature of their environment.

Certain medical conditions (i.e. taking certain medications):

- Mobility impaired tenants and those who are unable to self-care for themselves.
- People with diabetes and people who have heart conditions may have difficulty getting blood supply to the skin to aid in cooling.
- Scleroderma, cystic fibrosis and diabetes affect the number and function of sweat glands.
- Anti-depressants, anti-Parkinson drugs, some anti-histamines, blood pressure or “fluid pills” and drugs that alter mood, thought processes or sleeping patterns can affect how a tenant tolerates extreme heat.

Mental Illness:

- Impaired decision making and altered perception of heat may prevent a person from staying cool.
- Certain medications can impair the body's ability to cool down.

Obesity:

- Decreased blood flow to the skin makes obese persons less able to cool their bodies.
- A larger body mass holds heat for longer periods of time.

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An owner/operator can take actions to help tenants avoid heat-related illness:

- Provide tenants access to a cooler spot for several hours at a time (e.g. a common room with air-conditioning or a basement area).
- Keep windows in hallways slightly open to allow air to circulate.
- Provide extreme heat health guidelines to tenants or post the information in common areas.
- Have building staff check on vulnerable tenants every few hours.
- Advise tenants to drink lots of water or pure fruit juice, even if they do not feel thirsty.
- Ask tenants to keep windows open but only when the outdoor air is cooler than the indoor air i.e. evening. They can place a fan in or next to a window to bring in cooler air from outside. They should never use a fan to blow around hot indoor air when the windows are shut–this can be very dangerous. It can speed up serious heat-related illness.
- Advise tenants to close drapes and blinds in windows that receive direct sunlight. Keep lights off. Avoid using a cooking stove and oven.
- Suggest tenants cool down with cool baths, showers, and foot baths or by placing cool, wet towels on their necks or underarms.
- Suggest that they go out in the early morning or evening when it is cooler. When outdoors they should wear sunscreen (minimum 15 SPF), a wide brimmed hat, light coloured, loose fitting clothes, and seek shade often.
- Suggest going to air-conditioned or cool places such as shopping malls, libraries, community centres, or a friend's place.
- Suggest they avoid intense physical activity.
- Remind them never to leave a child or animal in a parked car or sleeping in direct sunlight.
- If they take medication remind them to check with their pharmacist about possible side effects due to heat.

Heat-related illness – Know the signs!

Heat-related illness can begin as dehydration and fatigue and progress to heat cramps, heat exhaustion and heat stroke. In serious cases there can be permanent damage to vital organs such as the brain, heart and nervous system.

- **Dehydration** results from too much water loss from the body. Sweating, poor fluid intake and certain medications can cause this condition.
- **Heat cramps** often occur as a result of dehydration and loss of salts and minerals through sweating during strenuous activities. Painful spasms are felt in the muscles of the legs, arms and abdomen.
- **Heat exhaustion** occurs from prolonged exposure to high temperatures and inadequate fluid replacement. It causes headache, heavy sweating, weakness, and a fast but weak pulse.
Immediate cooling is needed. Seek medical attention.
- **Heat stroke** is a medical emergency with a death rate as high as 33 percent. It is a total breakdown of the body's heat regulation system. Signs include red, hot and dry skin, a fast and strong pulse, confusion, seizures or unconsciousness, and a very high temperature (over 40°C or 104°F).
This is a life-threatening emergency – call 9-1-1 before giving first aid!

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