

## Extreme Heat Health Guidelines Information for the Elderly and their Care Providers

The elderly and frail are at high risk for serious heat-related illness during periods of extreme heat. With age, the body's cooling mechanisms work less well. Existing health conditions such as chronic illness, mental impairment, and obesity can also increase a person's risk. Heat-related illness can be life-threatening but is preventable.

### Preventing heat-related illness:

#### PLAN – HYDRATE – COOL

- Have a plan to deal with extreme heat including a backup plan for loss of power and air-conditioning.
- Know the signs and symptoms of heat-related illness including dehydration, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke and know what to do. See below: Heat-related illness: Know the signs.
- Stay well hydrated. Drink water or natural, diluted fruit juice – no alcoholic or caffeinated drinks. You may have a decreased sense of thirst-it is **important to drink even if you do not feel thirsty**.
- Keep cool and, if possible, in an air-conditioned place. You may use cool baths, showers or place cool, wet towels on your neck and underarms.
- If you have no air-conditioning, use fans with caution. Only use fans with open windows and when the outside air is cooler than the inside air. Night time is best.
- Maintain a comfortable indoor environment. Do not let the indoor temperature of your living area get as high as 32°C (90°F). If it gets this high you must move to a cooler area. Ask your landlord or property manager to provide a cool space somewhere in your residential building.
- Draw the drapes. Turn off lights. Do not use stoves or ovens.
- Time spent outdoors should be limited to the early morning or later afternoon when temperatures and UV radiation are less intense. Some medical conditions and medication may increase sensitivity to the heat. Ask your pharmacist or doctor for advice.
- Wear UV protective sunglasses, a wide-brimmed hat, and loose-fitting, light coloured clothing when you go outdoors. Seek shade.
- Check that wheelchairs, walkers and other metal equipment do not become dangerously hot.
- Apply sunscreen (SPF 15 or higher) 20 to 30 minutes before going outside to ensure absorption.
- When using DEET insect repellent, it should be applied 20 to 30 minutes after the sunscreen has been applied.
- Monitor the weather reports.

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**During a Heat Alert** follow the above guidelines and:

- consider reducing time spent outdoors and strenuous outdoor activities.
- ensure that your air-conditioning is in good working order and operating effectively.
- check on vulnerable friends/family/neighbours, especially those who have physical or mental illnesses, for signs of dehydration and other heat-related illnesses. If they have symptoms, call 911. While waiting give sips of cool water, remove extra clothing, and move them to a cooler location.
- check on vulnerable friends/family/neighbours and assist them to get to air-conditioned locations.
- listen and watch for KFL&A Public Health Extreme Heat Health alert and warning notices on the radio or TV.

**During a Heat Warning** follow the above and:

- limit time spent outdoors.
- suspend all strenuous outdoor activity.
- check more frequently on vulnerable friends/family/neighbours for signs of heat-related illness and assist them to get to air-conditioned locations or Cooling Centres each day.

**During a Heat Emergency** follow the above and:

- check several times each day on vulnerable friends/family/neighbours for signs of heat-related illness and assist them to get to air-conditioned locations or Cooling Centres for 2 to 3 hours per day.

### **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 more Health Information:

KFL&A Public Health  
[www.kflapublichealth.ca](http://www.kflapublichealth.ca)  
613-549-1232

Telehealth  
1-866-797-0000

For information on Cooling Centres or to obtain services:

City of Kingston – 613-546-0000 or [www.cityofkingston.ca](http://www.cityofkingston.ca)  
County of Frontenac – 613-548-9400 or [www.frontenacounty.ca](http://www.frontenacounty.ca)  
County of Lennox & Addington – 613-354-4883 or [www.lennox-addington.on.ca](http://www.lennox-addington.on.ca)