

Department of Health

health

Staying healthy in the heat





Who is most at risk?

Those most at risk in a heatwave are:

- people aged over 65 years, especially those living alone
- people who have a medical condition such as diabetes, kidney disease or mental illness
- people taking medications that may affect the way the body reacts to heat such as:
 - allergy medicines (antihistamines)
 - blood pressure and heart medicines (beta-blockers)
 - seizure medicines (anticonvulsants)
 - water pills (diuretics)
 - antidepressants or antipsychotics
- people with problematic alcohol or other drug use
- people with a disability who may not be able to identify or communicate their discomfort or thirst
- people who have trouble moving around (such as those who are bed bound or in wheelchairs)
- people who are overweight or obese
- pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, babies and young children
- people who work or are physically active outdoors.



Coping with the heat

- Look after yourself and keep in touch with sick or frail friends, neighbours and relatives.
 - Drink plenty of water, even if you don't feel thirsty (if your doctor normally limits your fluids, check how much to drink during hot weather).
 - Keep yourself cool by using wet towels, putting your feet in cool water and taking cool (not cold) showers.
 - Spend as much time as possible in cool or air-conditioned buildings (for example, shopping centres, libraries, cinemas or community centres).
 - Block out the sun at home during the day by closing curtains and blinds. Open the windows when there is a cool breeze.
 - Don't leave children, adults or animals in parked vehicles.
 - Stay out of the sun during the hottest part of the day. If you must go out, stay in the shade and take plenty of water with you. Wear a hat and light-coloured, loose-fitting clothing.
 - Eat smaller meals more often and cold meals such as salads. Make sure food that needs refrigeration is properly stored.
 - Avoid strenuous activity like sport, home improvements and gardening.
 - Watch or listen to news reports that provide more information during a heatwave.
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Preparing for hot weather

- Check that your fan or air-conditioner works well. Have your air-conditioner serviced if necessary.
- Stock up on food, water and medicines so you don't have to go out in the heat.
- Store medicines safely at the recommended temperature.
- Look at the things you can do to make your home cooler such as installing awnings, shade cloths or external blinds on the sides of the house facing the sun.

Preparing for a power failure

- Think about what you would do if a heatwave caused loss of electricity or disrupted public transport.
- Ensure you have a torch, fully charged mobile phone or a telephone that will work without electricity, a battery-operated radio and sufficient batteries.

What is a heatwave?

A heatwave is a period of unusual and uncomfortably hot weather that can affect anybody. It can also affect community infrastructure such as the power supply, public transport and other services.

Heatwaves can make existing medical conditions worse and cause a heat-related illness, which may be fatal.

Heat-related illnesses

Heat may cause illnesses such as heat cramps, heat exhaustion and heat stroke. More importantly heat may worsen the condition of someone who already has a medical issue such as heart disease or diabetes.

Illness	Symptoms	What to do
Heat cramps	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Muscle pains• Spasms in the abdomen, arms or legs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Stop activity and sit quietly in a cool place• Increase fluid intake• Rest a few hours before returning to activity• Seek medical help if cramps persist
Heat exhaustion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pale complexion and sweating• Rapid heart rate• Muscle cramps, weakness• Dizziness, headache• Nausea, vomiting• Fainting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Get the person to a cool area and lay them down• Remove their outer clothing• Wet their skin with cool water or wet cloths• Seek medical advice
Heat stroke (a life-threatening emergency)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Same symptoms as heat exhaustion• Dry skin with no sweating• Mental condition worsens, confusion• Seizure• Stroke-like symptoms or collapsing• Unconsciousness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Call an ambulance• Get the person to a cool area and lay them down• Remove their clothing• Wet their skin with water, fanning continuously• Position an unconscious person on their side and clear their airway

Important contact information

**For 24-hour health advice contact
NURSE-ON-CALL on 1300 60 60 24.**

**For life-threatening emergencies
telephone 000.**

This brochure is also available in other languages.

Please go to:

www.health.vic.gov.au/environment/heatwaves

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the Health Protection Branch on 1300 761 874.

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