

Recommendations to Municipalities in Response to Heat Warnings

Extreme heat can affect everyone’s health. However, some people are at greater risk of heat stress and related illness, including death due to a combination of greater exposure, physical health, and reduced access to resources. Hot temperatures can be especially dangerous for:

- Older adults
- Infants and young children
- People who are pregnant
- People with pre-existing health conditions (e.g., heart disease, respiratory disease, diabetes)
- People with reduced mobility
- People experiencing mental illness (e.g., schizophrenia, depression, anxiety)
- People taking certain medications
- People who use drugs and alcohol
- People living alone or who are socially isolated
- People exposed to heat at work (inside or outside)
- People who exercise vigorously or play sports in the heat
- People with lower income and fewer resources
- People experiencing homelessness or marginal housing
- People who do not speak English or French/newcomers to Canada
- Populations exposed to the urban heat island effect, where built-up areas are hotter than other areas

When municipalities take into consideration who is at greater risk, why they are at risk (e.g., work exposure, no access to air conditioning), and how to reach them (e.g., in-person outreach, telephone, media), extreme heat events can be better managed with targeted strategies to reduce heat health risks as identified below.

When Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) issues a heat warning, Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit’s (SMDHU) medical officer of health recommends affected municipalities activate their community engagement, communication, and community response components of the [Heat Alert and Response System](#)¹ (HARS). These components require planning and coordination with other community partners prior to a heat event.

Community Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with community partners (e.g., SMDHU, health care facilities, organizations that work with people at greater risk) to coordinate communication efforts and community responses.
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use various communication channels (e.g., social media, webpage, newsletters) to increase public awareness about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Signs and symptoms of heat-related illness and what to do if they occur. ○ Preventive measures that can be taken to help people to stay cool and safe from the effects of heat-related health impacts. ○ Locations and operating hours of cooling centres and facilities (e.g., interactive map on webpage, social media, local newspaper, radio). ○ Services available to support people and how they can be accessed. • Provide details about ECCC’s heat warnings to municipal staff, residents, tourists/visitors, and community groups/organizations.

¹ <https://www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/HealthUnit/Workplaces/Municipalities/Municipal-Heat-Response-Planning>

<p>Community Response</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase public access to spaces where people can stay cool. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Open well-identified, accessible community cooling facilities and/or extend hours of operation of community buildings such as libraries, community centres, etc. for people at greater risk to heat. ○ Open cooling facilities with overnight capabilities. ○ Create a 'doors open' policy for municipally owned buildings to support populations at greater risk to heat. ○ Increase accessibility to community swimming pools and splash pads by extending hours of operation and/or reducing admittance costs. ○ Provide transportation support to and from cooling facilities, cool-community buildings (e.g., libraries), swimming pools and splashpads (e.g., bus tickets, taxi cards, etc.). • Increase the number of staff/volunteers to assist with community response services and increased demand/need (e.g., at cooling facilities, drinking water distribution sites, lifeguards at beaches/pools, emergency service responders). • Deliver targeted services to groups that are at greater risk to heat (e.g., outreach to homeless populations) and provide potable water stations throughout the community (e.g., parks, community squares) in places that can be accessed. • Implement a system for people who self-register to receive updates on heat alerts and response measures by telephone, email, and text. This system may also include in-person visits and telephone calls by staff/volunteers who could check on the health of registered individuals and support their use of protective measures. • Activate a buddy/neighbourhood watch program to support people at greater risk to heat. • Modify work-rest cycles for workers exposed to extreme heat. Consider alternate work hours (e.g., work in early mornings, evenings, or nights to avoid intense daytime) and/or allow for plenty of breaks to rest and hydrate in cool spaces out of the sun. • Modify or cancel scheduled sports and outdoor events at recreational centres, municipal sports fields, daycares, summer camps, etc. • Work with community partners to provide emergency overnight shelters to those in need. • Consider financial assistance programs to support access to adaptative measures (e.g., AC).
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Municipalities play a significant role in reducing the risks of extreme heat. Preventative strategies that promote broad community health benefits, reduce exposure and sensitivity to heat and increase people's ability to protect themselves during periods of extreme heat are necessary to reduce the negative health impacts caused by our changing climate. More information on preventative strategies can be found on the SMDHU [website²](https://www.simcoemuskokahahealth.org/HealthUnit/Workplaces/Municipalities/Municipal-Heat-Response-Planning#15ab739e-c5e8-4771-a97c-d8c99013bc7c).

² <https://www.simcoemuskokahahealth.org/HealthUnit/Workplaces/Municipalities/Municipal-Heat-Response-Planning#15ab739e-c5e8-4771-a97c-d8c99013bc7c>