



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES
Aging and Long-Term Support Administration
PO Box 45600, Olympia, Washington 98504-5600

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EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS CONSIDERATIONS FOR EXTREME HEAT

Dear Administrator/Provider/Superintendent:

High temperatures have already impacted the state and will continue to throughout the summer. Some groups, including older adults, individuals with chronic health conditions, and individuals with mental illnesses are among the most vulnerable populations in extreme heat conditions. The purpose of this letter is to reemphasize preparedness tips your facility may take to prepare for heat and best serve your residents.

Extreme heat has a strong correlation with deaths in long-term care settings. Extreme heat is particularly hazardous to individuals with physical, sensory, medical conditions, Residents with a history of dehydration, cardiovascular disease, or pulmonary disease are particularly susceptible to heat-related illnesses and complications. All staff should be aware and monitoring for signs, symptoms, and consequences of heat exhaustion, heat stroke, and heat cramps.

Extreme heat should be treated as a major weather emergency, just like an extreme storm and the possibility of power outages. Now is the time to pull out the facility emergency and disaster plans, ensure they are up to date, and that staff are educated on how and what to do.

Resident Care Considerations:

- Alert staff to monitor residents for the signs and symptoms of heat illness (provided in section below).
- Notify the resident's physician of such observations and obtain medical services as needed.
- Review resident medications and identify those that may cause residents to become more susceptible to harm from heat and sunlight.
- Assure that facility policies and procedures for heat emergency situations are current, complete, and staff are trained.
- Monitor temperatures in care areas, resident rooms and in outside common areas.
- Help decrease temperatures by closing window blinds and turning off unneeded lights in the daytime.
- Assist residents to maintain adequate fluid intake. In addition to water, consider popsicles, Jell-o, sherbet, and juices to keep residents hydrated.
- Provide additional showers or baths.
- Avoid extreme temperature changes. A cool shower immediately after coming in from hot temperatures can result in hypothermia, particularly for elderly or very young people.
- Be familiar with cooling centers in your area.

Residents in Outdoor Spaces

- Limit the amount of time spent outdoors. Cycle time back into climate-controlled environments.
- Closely monitor residents, especially when outside. Have system in place to track cumulative time outdoors. Ensure pertinent information is passed through during shift changes.
- Maintain awareness of underlying medical conditions, medications taken, and cognitive status of residents when spending time outdoors.
- Ensure proper choice of resident's clothing to ensure they are appropriate in extreme temperatures. Loose-fitting, light-colored cotton clothing is best to allow the skin to breathe. Loose hats and sunglasses should also be worn.
- Apply sunscreen of SPF 15 or more. Apply 15-30 minutes prior to going outside. Use lip balm that contains sunscreen.
- Inspect outdoor furniture for temperatures. Furniture in direct sunlight may emit heat and cause burns.
- Monitor outdoor temperatures through weather forecasts and thermometers.
- Consider installation of misting fans and outdoor shades.

Heat Exhaustion:

- Warning Signals: Gradual weakness, nausea, anxiety, excess sweating, syncope (fainting).
- Appearance and Signs: Skin is pale, grayish, and clammy.
- Management: For syncope, place head down and administer cool, slightly salty fluids immediately.

Heat Stroke (Serious Emergency):

- Warning Signals: Headache, weakness, sudden or worsening confusion, and sudden loss of consciousness.
- Appearance and Signs: Hot, red, dry skin, little sweating, very high temperature, and hard, rapid pulse.
- Management: Immediately cool skin by wrapping or immersing in cold water or ice. Call 911.

Heat Cramps:

- Warning Signals: Severe cramps and spasms in the arms, legs, or abdomen.
- Appearance and Signs: Skin may be hot and dry, or cool and clammy, depending on the humidity. The muscles feel like hard knots.
- Management: Provide cool fluids and foods containing sodium chloride (table salt).

Managing Heat within Facility

- Block direct sun from windows by using awnings, thermal curtains/blinds, and/or sun film on windows.
- Open windows (up to 6 inches maximum – windows secured) to bring in fresh air and to help with ventilation at night.
- Monitor indoor heat temperatures in all areas of the building for follow up care and attention of residents and employees. Ensure indoor temperatures remain below 26°C as per licensing standards.
- Identify cooling options/areas (e.g., cooler room(s), portable air conditioner, cooler shower) if possible, for residents and employees.

Reminder about Fan and Portable AC Use

- If it is necessary to use fans or portable AC units, enhanced monitoring may be required. Please consult with your IPC Team for guidance.
- Fans should be cleaned regularly, at a minimal once a month with a neutral detergent or wipe after disconnection from the power source.
- If they are visibly dusty, they should be cleaned immediately. Perform hand hygiene when cleaning and handling air conditioner and fan parts.
- Remove any water sitting in the air conditioner pans when not in daily use - empty, clean and disinfect the drip pan and allow to dry completely before storing.
- Vent the portable AC units out windows, where possible.

Generators and auxiliary power systems should be tested regularly, ensuring there is adequate fuel and other supplies on hand, and knowing what building systems (including HVAC) will work when using a generator. Ensure adequate water supplies and fuel is available to shelter residents in place for several days should the need arise. Purchase supplies such as portable cooling systems before the summer seasons. Be ready as resources could be depleted by the time extreme weather occurs.

References and Further Information

- [Washington State-211- Cooling Center Locations](#)
- [Preparing for Wildfire and Extreme Heat in LTC Settings](#)
- [National Weather Service: HeatRisk Tool](#)
- [Ready.gov Extreme Heat](#)
- [Center for Disease Control: Heat and Older Adults](#)
- [Fraser Health: Preparation for Extreme Heat in LTC Settings](#)
- [Heat.gov Who Is Most at Risk to Extreme Heat?](#)

Thank you for your continued commitment to resident health and safety. Please see the documents on the [Residential Care Services Internet page](#) for specific strategies that you may implement into your emergency plans.

If you have any questions, please contact your local RCS Field Manager or Richard Freed, Emergency Preparedness Coordinator, Richard.Freed@dshs.wa.gov, 360-819-7001.

Sincerely,



for

Amy Abbott, Director
Residential Care Services

DSHS: "Transforming Lives"