

Emergency Information Bulletin

For Immediate Release | August 12, 2021

Extreme Heat Alert

LOWER MAINLAND, B.C. – Medical Health Officers from Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH) and Fraser Health (FH) are advising the public that as heat continues to build across the Lower Mainland, Environment Canada’s Heat Warning has now been escalated to an Extreme Heat Alert.

High temperatures forecast for tomorrow are anticipated to continue until Sunday, with daytime highs ranging from 32 to 35 degrees celsius combined with overnight lows of 17 to 19 degrees celsius. Humidex values during this period will reach the high 30's.

The criteria for an Extreme Heat Alert have been met based on the temperature at YVR or Abbotsford as measured at 14:00 pm daily, averaged with the following day’s maximum temperature. High temperatures in this range are historically associated with an increase in deaths among Lower Mainland residents.

While everyone is at risk of heat related illness, hot temperatures can be especially dangerous for the young, the elderly, those working or exercising in the heat, persons with chronic heart and lung conditions, some people with mental health conditions, people living alone and people experiencing homelessness or inadequate housing. If you are taking medication, ask your doctor or pharmacist if it increases your health risk in the heat and follow their recommendations.

Medical Health Officers are again strongly advising Lower Mainland residents to take precautions to protect themselves and others. Combined with significant wildfire smoke rolling into the Lower Mainland for the next few days, it is critical to take extra steps as a priority to protect both yourself and those who are vulnerable in our communities.

While the Extreme Heat Alert is in place:

- Cooling centres will be open, and no one should be denied access to these centres because of concerns about crowding or physical distancing.
- If people are wearing a mask and have difficulty breathing, they should remove the mask, whether they are indoors or outside, as wearing a mask may impact thermal regulation during heat events.

Based on previous heat events, the anticipated temperatures are proven to cause negative health outcomes among Lower Mainland residents who may not be acclimatized to temperatures in this range and may not have ready access to measures such as air conditioning. Heat stress can pose an immediate

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danger to health and may be fatal. Symptoms of severe heat-related illness can include dizziness, confusion, weakness and fainting or collapsing, including loss of consciousness.

Other important steps people living in the Lower Mainland are advised to take for the duration of the Extreme Heat Alert include:

- **Conduct regular checks on vulnerable people-** Individuals who live alone, particularly seniors, are at high risk of heat-related illness. Check in regularly to ensure they have no symptoms.
 - If you identify signs of illness, assist in moving them to a cooler indoor or shaded space, support them in getting hydrated and seek medical assistance.
 - If urgent medical support is required, call 9-1-1 without delay.
- **Access other air conditioned spaces-** Seek out an air-conditioned facility (such as a shopping centre, library, community centre, restaurant, or a residence of friends or family).
 - Use public splash pools, water parks or pools or take a cool bath or shower.
 - At high temperatures, fans alone are not effective. Applying cool water mist or wet towels prior to sitting in front of a fan is a quick way to cool off.
- **Keep your home cool-** Open windows, close shades, use an air conditioner (if you have one) and prepare meals that do not require an oven.
- **Avoid tiring work or exercise in the heat-** If you must exercise or conduct strenuous work, drink two to four glasses of non-alcoholic fluids each hour. Limit day time outdoor activity to early morning and evening time.
- **Stay hydrated-** Drink cool non-alcoholic beverages (preferably water) irrespective of your activity intake- don't wait until you are thirsty. If your doctor generally limits the amount of fluid you drink or you take water pills, ask about increasing the amount of water you can drink while the weather is hot.
- **Keep pets and children cool-** Never leave children or pets alone in a parked car. Temperatures can rise to 52°C (125°F) within 20 minutes in an enclosed vehicle when the outside temperature is 34°C (93°F).
- **Dress for the weather-** Wear loose, light-weight clothing. Protect yourself from the sun by wearing a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses.
- **Avoid sunburn-** Stay in the shade or use sunscreen with SPF 15 or more.
- **Seeking care-** For critical, life-threatening conditions, please call 9-1-1 or go to the nearest emergency department. This includes anyone experiencing difficulty breathing, shortness of breath or chest pain.
 - For other non-life-threatening matters, there are a number of options to seek care during the summer. Urgent and Primary Care Centres (UPCCs) are open evenings and weekend, seven days a week and provide care for unexpected, non-life threatening health concerns that require treatment within 48 hours.

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- If you are unsure where to seek care, please call 8-1-1 or your family physician.

Heat Notifications

To provide the public and partner organizations with a warning of the health risk from heat events, temperature thresholds have been established by the BC Center for Disease Control in collaboration with Environment and Climate Change Canada, Health Canada, and B.C. health authorities.

HEAT WARNING (level 1): Get Ready, Take Action.

Environment and Climate Change Canada issues Heat Warnings in B.C. for:

- **Southwest** (includes the North Shore, Vancouver, Richmond, Howe Sound, Whistler, Pemberton and the Sunshine Coast as well as Eastern Metro Vancouver including Coquitlam, Surrey, and the Fraser Valley) when:
 - **Coastal station** (Vancouver Airport): Two or more consecutive days of daytime maximum temperatures are expected to reach 29°C or warmer and nighttime minimum temperatures are expected to be at 16°C or warmer.
 - **Inland station** (Abbotsford Airport): Two or more consecutive days of daytime maximum temperatures are expected to reach 33°C or warmer and nighttime minimum temperatures are expected to be at 17°C or warmer.

Warnings are issued for both Coastal and Inland sections if either criteria are met.

- **Northwest** (Central and Northern Coast (inland and coastal regions), Northern Vancouver Island, and northwestern B.C.) when two or more consecutive days of daytime maximum temperatures are expected to reach 28°C or warmer and nighttime minimum temperatures are expected to be at 13°C or warmer.

According to historical BCCDC data, the Heat Warning criteria indicate temperatures at which an increase in deaths in the community is expected.

EXTREME HEAT ALERT (Level 2): Southwest region only – Take Action Now

For the Southwest region, VCH and Fraser Health will issue a joint Extreme Heat Alert when the two-day average of high temperatures is predicted to reach 36°C or higher at the Abbotsford Airport and/or is predicted to reach 31°C or higher at the Vancouver airport, based on temperatures measured at 2 p.m.

The Extreme Heat Alert criteria indicate temperatures at which the expected risk to the public is extremely high, and a larger increase in deaths in the community is expected, based on recommendations by the BCCDC in addition to a health authority assessment of anticipated risk to health. The alert triggers additional responses from the health authority, local government and partner organizations as well as public messaging to strongly encourage individuals and communities to be aware of the risk and take action to stay cool.

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Get Informed

- Visit VCH.ca/heat or fraserhealth.ca/sunsafety for more information about the health impacts of heat, local cooling centres and other resources on preventing health impacts
- For more information on heat-related illness, call HealthLink BC at 811.
- Fraser Health Virtual Care allows you to connect with a health professional. You can call 1-800-314-0999 or use the web chat from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. seven days a week at www.fraserhealth.ca/virtualcare

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Air quality

B.C. wildfires are common during the summer months, resulting in poorer quality air. As air quality can change quickly due to warmer temperatures and smoke from wildfires, we are urging people in our communities to minimize exposure to smoky air.

Although wildfire smoke is different from air pollution caused by traffic or industry, it is also harmful to human health, especially in older adults, infants, young children, pregnant women and people with chronic conditions such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and heart disease.

- Help keep yourself and your loved ones safe by taking the following steps now, ahead of any potential exposure to smoky air:
 - Check your medications, especially rescue medications for breathing
 - Keep windows and doors closed if possible without overheating
 - Use a portable HEPA air cleaner
 - Stay hydrated
 - Reduce time spent outdoors and reduce strenuous activities, because breathing harder means inhaling more smoky air
 - Pay attention to [air quality reports](#), especially the [air quality health index](#)
 - Spend time in a home or community space that has air conditioning, which will have cleaner air. Look for designated cleaner air spaces in your community with enhanced air filtration. Buildings with air conditioning such as cooling centers will have cleaner air.
- People with pre-existing medical conditions should take extra precautions during this time, including monitoring for symptoms and keeping rescue medications with them when out.
- Common symptoms can include lung irritation, eye irritation, runny nose, sore throat, headaches, and mild cough. If you experience more severe symptoms such as shortness of breath, severe cough, dizziness, chest discomfort, heart palpitations, or wheezing, seek medical attention immediately.

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- For more information about air quality, please visit fraserhealth.ca/airquality or vch.ca.
- For information about wildfire smoke, please visit bccdc.ca/wildfiresmoke.

Vancouver Coastal Health is responsible for the delivery of \$4.1 billion in community, hospital and long-term care to more than one million people in communities including Richmond, Vancouver, the North Shore, Sunshine Coast, Sea to Sky corridor, Powell River, Bella Bella and Bella Coola. VCH also provides specialized care and services for people throughout B.C., and is the province's hub of health-care education and research.

Fraser Health is responsible for the delivery of hospital and community-based health services to over 1.8 million people in 20 diverse communities from Burnaby to Fraser Canyon on the traditional territories of the Coast Salish and Nlaka'pamux Nations. Our team of nearly 40,000 staff, medical staff and volunteers is dedicated to serving our patients, families and communities to deliver on our vision: Better health, best in health care.

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