

# HEAT CHECK-IN SUPPORT FRAMEWORK FOR NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the non-governmental organizations (NGOs), municipalities, passionate community members, and Vancouver Coastal Health departments who contributed to this framework. Non-governmental organizations are the experts on the ground and we were fortunate to learn from their extensive lived experience. Vancouver Coastal Health is committed to working alongside NGOs and fostering connections that can be relied upon when planning for and responding to emergencies. We hope that this framework will provide tools to support NGOs in their work and that extreme heat response will continue to evolve as we learn together across organizations.

## Contact



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# PURPOSE OF THIS FRAMEWORK

Health authorities across British Columbia recognize the severe health risks associated with extreme heat and are working to increase awareness and knowledge around this environmental hazard. High indoor temperatures pose the greatest risk of death during heat events and checking on people at higher risk from heat to extreme heat may be life-saving.

The National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health (NCCEH), has led the development of a guide to conducting heat check-ins: [Health Checks During Extreme Heat Events](#). This national resource is intended for community members without health training and provides a plain-language description of how to check-on people most at risk during extreme heat events. The Vancouver Coastal Health Healthy Environments & Climate Change (VCH HECC Team) set out to develop complementary resources to the NCCEH guide, to empower organizations to conduct heat check-ins.

In spring 2022, the VCH HECC Team engaged local governments and community organizations to learn what they need to help them conduct heat check-ins to support community members. Partners identified the need for information on how to run check-ins and answers to expected common questions among staff and check-in recipients. Heat check-ins happen in a variety of settings and by staff or volunteers with diverse training. Given the wide context, this framework was created so organizations may select information that is most relevant to their setting to develop their own organizational check-in plans.

If organizations encounter challenges developing heat check-in plans or during heat events, please consult the VCH HECC Team for more specific guidance. See the Resources page for hours and contact information. The VCH HECC Team will also be presenting workshops for organizations interested to build this capacity among staff and volunteers.



**For someone who is at higher risk from heat, a check-in may be life-saving.**

# HEAT CHECK-IN OVERVIEW



## What is a Heat Check-In

A heat check-in is a visit, call or text to a person at higher risk from heat during a heat event to assess the heat-related safety of their home environment, if they show signs of heat stress and whether they need help.



## Who Can Do Check-Ins

Check-ins do not require health training and may be run by organizations or people in the community, such as neighbours.



## How to Do a Check-In

The NCCHEH guide [Health Checks During Extreme Heat Events](#) explains how to conduct both in-person and phone check-ins, including questions to ask and steps to take if the person is experiencing heat-related illness. It is for individuals without health training and is in plain language. See the Resource page for link.



## Why are Check-Ins Important

Check-ins are provided during heat events for a number of people in healthcare and community programs, but many people are not connected to these services and are potentially socially isolated. Organizations and community members can increase outreach to people at higher risk from heat through heat check-ins, potentially preventing deaths.

**The BC Coroners Service reported that 98% of the heat-related deaths during the 2021 BC heat dome occurred indoors in a residence.**



# HEAT RISKS

## Dangerous Temperatures

As temperatures rise, so does the risk for severe health impacts. For people at higher risk from heat, risk for heat-related illness may increase at indoor temperatures over 26 °C (78 °F) and may significantly increase at indoor temperatures over 31 °C (88 °F). Without air conditioning or other mechanical cooling, different cooling measures such as adjusting window shades may only drop indoor temperature by a few degrees. If indoor temperatures are consistently high, people at higher risk from heat are advised to move to a cooler location or, if that is not possible, receive heat check-ins more frequently. For more details see Quick Facts section.

Outdoor and indoor temperatures rise throughout the day, with outdoor temperatures typically peaking in the late afternoon and indoor temperatures in the evening (see figure below). Even if it is cooling down outside, the heat and the risk may still be high indoors.

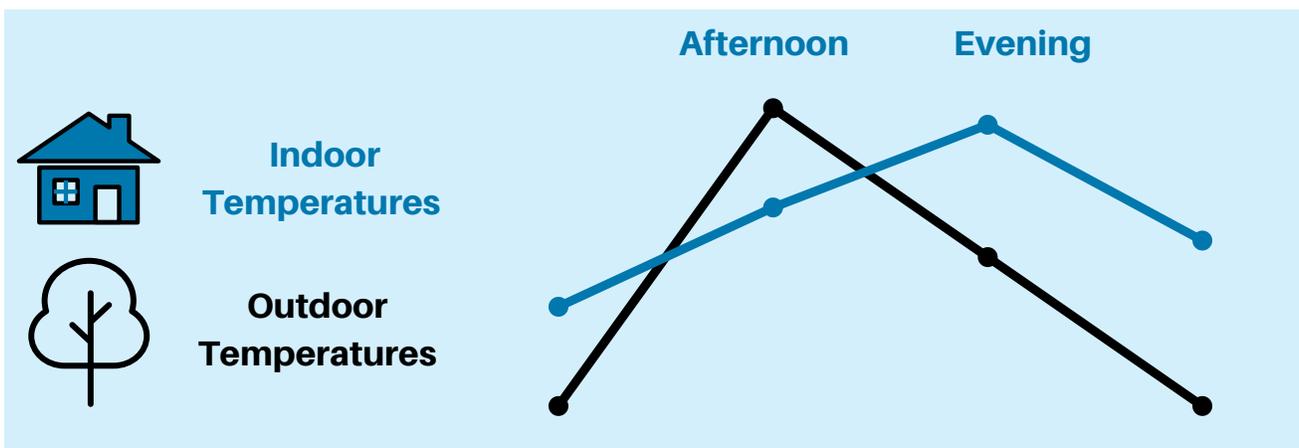
## Physical Environment Risks

- Lack of mechanical cooling, such as air-conditioning or a heat pump
- Higher floors of buildings
- Building floors directly under the roof
- South and/or west facing windows
- Large-sized windows
- Single pane windows
- No outside shade on windows
- No evening cross breeze
- Lack of neighbourhood trees and other green features

## People at Higher Risk from Heat

People respond differently to heat, and some people are at higher risk of experiencing health effects. Individuals with multiple risk factors are at higher risk and are more likely to require frequent check-ins. Support to stay cool may be especially important for the following groups of people:

- Older adults, especially those aged 60 years or older
- People with schizophrenia, depression, anxiety disorders or dementia
- People who live alone
- People with pre-existing health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease or respiratory disease
- People with substance use disorders, including alcohol
- People with limited mobility
- People experiencing homelessness or who are marginally housed
- People who are pregnant
- Infants and young children



# HEAT-RELATED ILLNESS

Heat-related illness is an umbrella term for conditions caused by heat, such as heat rash, sunburn, heat cramps, heat exhaustion and, the most severe, heat stroke. During heat check-ins, you can look for signs and symptoms of heat-related illness.

## Signs and Symptoms of Heat Exhaustion Include:

- Heavy Sweating
- Dizziness
- Nausea or Vomiting
- Rapid Breathing and Heartbeat
- Headache
- Difficulty Concentrating
- Muscle Cramps
- Extreme Thirst
- New Skin Rash
- Dark Urine & Decreased Urination
- Body temperature over 38 °C (100°F)

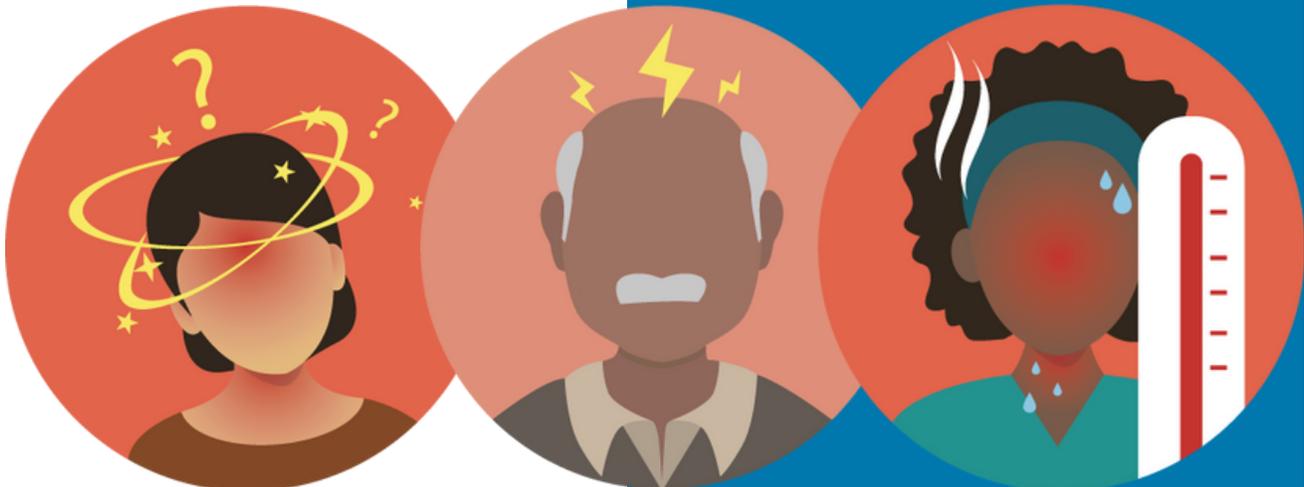
If the check-in recipient shows these signs and symptoms, move them to a cooler location if possible, give them water, and suggest ways to cool their body such as a cool bath or shower, wetting their clothes, or applying cool water to the skin. **This is to try to prevent them from developing heat stroke, which is a medical emergency.**

## Signs and Symptoms of Heat Stroke Include:

- Body Temperature over 39 °C (102°F)
- Fainting or Drowsy
- Confusion
- Lack of Coordination
- Very Hot and Red Skin

### HEAT STROKE IS A MEDICAL EMERGENCY

Seek medical attention immediately at an emergency room or urgent care centre. Call 911 if necessary. While waiting for help, cool the check-in recipient right away by moving them to a cool place if you can, and apply cold water to large areas of the skin.



# CHECK-IN PROCEDURES

## Type of Check-In

Phone calls, text messages, in-person visits or a combination may be used. Consider asking the individual's preference because they may be more likely to notice and respond to the check-in.

## Starting and Ending Check-Ins

Heat check-ins may start when a **Heat Warning** or **Extreme Heat Emergency** is declared (see Quick Facts for a description). When deciding when to end check-ins, keep in mind that people at higher risk may be at risk even after a heat alert has ended. When overnight temperatures are high, the body is exposed to days of high temperatures without time to recover at night. This cumulative effect of heat can affect people at higher risk from heat and may worsen pre-existing health conditions. Also, once people at higher risk from heat are overheated, they may take longer to cool their body fully.

## Check-In Timing and Frequency

The most important thing is for individuals to receive a check-in at least once a day, regardless of the time. Morning check-ins allow for education and interventions that may prevent heat-related illness later in the day. Evening check-ins, during the hottest indoor temperatures of the day, provide a check-in when the heat risk may be higher. Increasing the frequency of check-ins to multiple times a day is advised for those most at risk, especially if an **Extreme Heat Emergency** is declared.

## Pre-Identify People at Higher Risk

Identifying people at higher risk from heat before a heat event provides an opportunity to share ways to prepare, gather basic information, offer check-ins and set expectations. You may want to inquire if the person already has someone reliable and committed to checking in on them so you can prioritize individuals that are more isolated.

## Discuss Check-Ins with Recipients

Inform check-in recipients of the plan and reason for check-ins during extreme heat events. If it will be a phone or text check-in, let them know what number will be displayed. Ask for the most reliable way to reach them and their address, in case you need to call 9-1-1. Ask for an emergency contact name, relation and phone number, in case there is no answer during the check-in. Explain the procedure if there is no answer during the check-in.

## Documentation

Documentation may record completed check-ins, actions taken, concerns to monitor, timing of next check-in, handoffs, etc. A simple pen-and-paper table listing check-in recipients and related information can be effective. Some organizations use real-time software like Microsoft Teams or OneNote to track checks-in so multiple team members can save information at the same time. As with other client information, organizations should plan to protect privacy of personal information (e.g. a paper table with information on home conditions should be stored in a safe space).

**Decide how your organization will run check-ins. When will check-ins start, what type of check-ins will be done and who will receive check-ins?**

# PREPARE FOR OTHER SCENARIOS

## Duplication

Look for opportunities to reduce duplicate check-ins. For example, during the first check-in NGO staff can ask if the client already received a check-in. As well, housing organizations may have a front desk sign-in sheet that confirms a client had a support worker visit. If a person is receiving check-ins through a health or social service, mutually confirm these will be continued before discontinuing duplicate check-ins.

## Hand-Offs

When there is limited capacity, consider assigning check-ins to another reliable person, like an emergency contact, so your organization can free up time to prioritize individuals that are more isolated. Consider how your organization will document hand-offs and confirm that the other person understands what to do during a heat emergency.

## No Answer

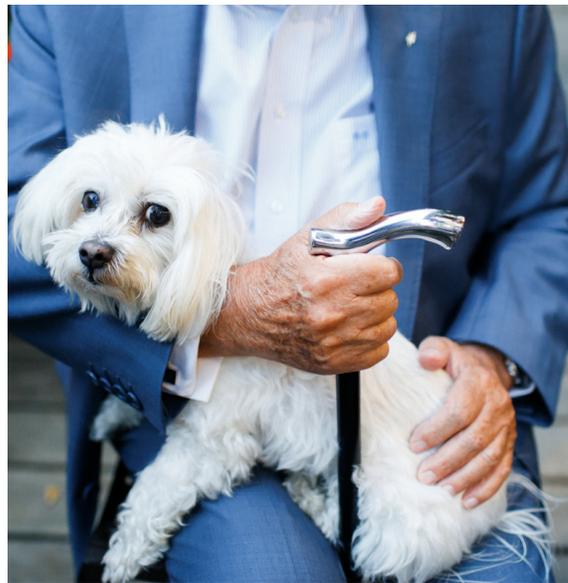
The procedure for no answer may depend on your organization's role, responsibilities and the previous interactions with an individual. Example responses may include calling back, notifying an emergency contact, escalating to an in-person check-in or requesting a police wellness check. BC Housing has *Wellness Check-In Cards for Tenants* that can be taped to the door or put through the mail slot. See Resources page for link.

## Local Scenarios

Prepare for scenarios with the population you serve, in the spaces and communities that you work.

## Other Scenarios

See examples in the Quick Facts section.



**Prepare for scenarios with the population you serve, in the spaces and communities that you work.**

# STAFF & VOLUNTEERS



## Training

If possible, provide pre-season training for staff or volunteers. Training may include workshops (including those presented by Vancouver Coastal Health) or first aid courses. Are there staff that can be trained to coordinate volunteers who show up to help during emergencies?



## Questions

There are printable Quick Facts and a Heat Check-in Workflow at the end of this document. The back of the workflow includes resource numbers and blank sections to fill in relevant local resources and the number for a manager that staff or volunteers can contact with questions.



## Scheduling

It is helpful to plan for staffing challenges during heat events, like closed childcare facilities or emergencies falling on a weekend or holiday. Can other staff or teams be redeployed to check-ins during heat events, such as outdoor workers who cannot work due to the heat risk? For staff safety, plan for staff or volunteers to take more frequent breaks.



## Safety

Plan regular breaks in cool spaces, access to water, and loose-fitting clothing to stay cool. Encourage staff to monitor each other for heat-related illness. If staff are doing in-person check-ins, how will they stay safe offsite? Consider staff pairing up, carrying a cell phone and planning regular call-in times. See Resources page more information.



## Debrief

Encourage staff or volunteers to contact a manager to debrief, particularly after challenging check-ins. Some organizations conduct debriefs after heat alert periods. See Resources page for more information on debriefs and critical incident stress.



# EQUIPMENT

## Phone or Text Check-Ins

- **Phones**
- **Apps to block outgoing number and display facility name:** To encourage people to pick up the call, and protect staff or volunteer privacy if using their own phones. Example: Zoiper.
- **A check-in script or NCCEH Check-In Guide**
- **Quick Facts section** (see below) **and Heat Check-In Workflow for NGOs** (see below)
- **Documentation:** Paper and pens or computer

## In-Person Check-Ins

- **Cell phones**
- **Pens and Clipboards**
- **Printed Resources:** Check-in script or the NCCEH Check-In Guide, Quick Facts section (see below) and Heat Check-In Workflow for NGOs (see below)
- **Thermometers:** To check indoor temperatures or provide to check-in recipient
- **Fliers or Postcards with Heat Information:** To tape to the door, put in the mail slot or hand out (See BC Housing Resources)
- **Supplies for rapidly cooling someone with possible heat stroke:** Towel (for applying cold water to skin) and water (if the check-in recipient may not be near running water).

**Gather equipment for staff, volunteers and people receiving check-ins. These items may be helpful, but it is not necessary that they are all used.**

## To Cool People and Spaces

- **Portable Air Conditioning:** To cool homes or create a common cooling room.
- **Fans:** To bring cool air in overnight, or move cool air around a space. Fans pointed directly at a person only give the perception of cooling and are not an effective direct cooling mechanism at high temperatures.
- **Thermometers:** To monitor indoor temperatures and use during in-person check-ins.
- **Towels, Hats, or Extra Lightweight Clothing:** To wet and wear throughout the day to stay cool.
- **Buckets:** To place feet/ ankles/ legs in cool water.
- **Window Coverings:** Materials could be cardboard covered in foil (with the foil facing outside to reflect the sun), dark fabric etc.
- **Bottled Water:** For offsite check-ins and mobile staff teams.
- **Water Bottles or Cups:** For onsite staff and building tenants with access to running water.



# WHAT ELSE CAN BE DONE

## Prepare a Heat Plan

Heat events may occur early in the summer and there may only be 24-48 hours notice before a heat alert. Communication, equipment, staffing and response plans are best prepared ahead of the summer season. The VCH HECC Team is offering consultations for organizations who have questions about heat plans or would like their plan reviewed. See Resources page for links to heat plan guidance, the *BC Heat Alert Response System* and contact information for the VCH HECC Team.

## Help People at Higher Risk Prepare

Encourage people at higher risk from heat to plan for heat events, look for a “heat buddy” and prepare a go-bag in case they need to go to a cooling centre or a cooler space. Once a heat event arrives, individuals with mobility challenges or medical conditions may lack energy to pack, which can be a barrier to moving to a safer cool space. The *Prepared BC Extreme Heat Preparedness Guide* helps people create a plan. See Resources page for link.

## Distribute Heat Information

Share the risk of heat events with your community, both pre-season and once heat alerts are announced. Multiple forms of communication are best because people at higher risk from heat may not have a phone or internet access. Ideas include fliers, posters on community boards or in neighbourhood buildings, newsletters, hosting a heat preparedness event or engaging key community members to spread the message. See Resources page for links to resources on heat and health, including translated material.



## Consider a Shared Cooling Space

During emergencies, people go to places they are familiar with and trust. People with mobility challenges may be more likely to access a cooling space that is close by. Even if your organization does not have central air conditioning, there are different types of cooling spaces that provide relief from the heat. Indoor cooling spaces may have central air-conditioning, portable air-conditioning or no air-conditioning, such as a cool basement room. Outdoor cooling spaces may be a misting tent or a shaded area under built structures or greenery, with lots of water to keep people cool (i.e towels for wetting to put on body, water to wet clothing, basins with cool water to put feet in etc.)

People may be at cooling spaces for hours and will need access to bathrooms, drinking water and chairs. People with mobility challenges and others will need universally accessible spaces, and people including some older adults may need chairs with armrests to get up. Additional amenities can encourage cooling centre use, such as resting leisure activities (e.g. television, reading material, card/board games), nap spaces, phone chargers and food. For more information on setting up and operating a cool space see Resources page for the VCH guide *Creating Cooling Spaces During Hot Weather*.

# RESOURCES FOR NGOS

Topic	Title and Link	Description of Resource
<b>Heat Check-Ins</b>	<a href="#">NCCEH: Health Checks During Extreme Heat Events</a>	Public guide to conducting extreme heat check-ins, including information for both in-person and phone check-ins.
<b>Public Heat Information</b>	<a href="#">VCH: Extreme Heat Webpage</a>	Information for the public, NGOs and health professionals regarding extreme heat, including posters and videos. <b>Translations available.</b>
	<a href="#">Healthlink BC: Beat the Heat Webpage</a>	Information on heat warnings, heat related illness and other provincial heat resources.
	<a href="#">Prepared BC: Extreme Heat Preparedness Guide</a>	A guide for the public to learn about and create a plan for extreme heat events. <b>Translations available.</b>
	<a href="#">Fraser Health: Fans in Extreme Heat FAQ</a>	Fans may not effectively reduce body temperatures or prevent heat-related illness in people at risk. Learn evidence-based best practices for fan use.
<b>NGO Heat Preparedness and Planning</b>	<a href="#">BC Heat Alert and Response System (BC HARS)</a>	Recommended actions for NGOs during each extreme heat alert level, with descriptions of the alert levels. It also explains the roles and responsibilities of other agencies.
	<a href="#">Interior Health: Heat Alert and Response Planning for Interior BC Communities</a>	Guide to developing municipal heat plans. Pages 13- 25 are helpful examples to draw from when creating NGO heat plans.
	<a href="#">Health Canada: Heat Alert and Response Systems to Protect Health</a>	Best practices guidebook with recommendations on how to develop and implement a heat plan.
<b>Weather</b>	<a href="#">Environment Canada: Public Weather Alerts for BC</a>	BC weather alerts are posted on this webpage.
	<a href="#">Environment Canada: "WeatherCAN" App</a>	Push notifications for all Environment Canada and Climate Change Canada weather alerts for your saved locations.
	<a href="#">Environment Canada: "Hello Weather"</a>	Automated weather forecasts over the telephone, including heat and air quality warnings.

# RESOURCES FOR NGOS

Topic	Title and Link	Description of Resource
Cooling Spaces	<a href="#">VCH Guidance for Cooling Spaces</a>	<i>Creating Cooling Spaces During Hot Weather.</i> Best practices for setting up and operating a community cooling space or centre.
	<a href="#">VCH and City of Vancouver: DIY Cool Kits</a>	Build a kit with everyday items to help people stay cool. <b>Translations available.</b>
Staff and Volunteers	<a href="#">WorkSafe BC: Heat Stress Webpage</a>	Various resources for protecting workers during extreme heat.
	<a href="#">BC "Hot Debrief Guide"</a>	Explains post-event debriefing, to occur as soon as possible after an event, with a target duration of 10-15 minutes. Developed for clinicians but applicable for other settings.
	<a href="#">BC EM: Debrief After an Emergency</a>	After emergency debriefing process and example questions.
	<a href="#">WorkSafe BC: Critical Incident Response</a>	A critical incident is a sudden or unexpected incident, like the death of a client. Access free supports for critical incidents.
Pets	<a href="#">BC Housing: Heat and Pets</a>	Tips for heat events and signs of heat-related illness in pets.
Substance Use	<a href="#">Towards the Heart: Using Substances During Heat</a>	Resources for people who use substances during heat events and service providers who support them.
Wildfire Smoke	<a href="#">BCCDC: Wildfire Smoke</a>	Information for the public on health effects of smoke, higher risk groups, ways to protect people from smoke and home-made box air fan filters. <b>Translations available.</b>
Additional Tools	<a href="#">BC Housing: Extreme Heat Resources and Webinars</a>	Resources and tools for housing providers and NGOs. Examples include information on preparing buildings for heat events, heat webinars and useful Wellness Check-In Cards for Tenants.
Consult Your Health Authority	Vancouver Coastal or Fraser Health: Healthy Environments and Climate Change	If your organization encounters challenges developing heat check-in or response plans, or during heat events, please contact us for more specific guidance. See contact info on page 2.

# QUICK FACTS

## Calling 911

Heat stroke is a medical emergency. Seek medical attention immediately at an emergency room or urgent care centre. Call 911 if necessary. 911 call-takers follow call-scripts to prioritize services for the most critically ill and use the information provided to determine what help to send. If symptoms worsen, call back to update 911. If you are doing an in-person check-in, try to call from a cell phone so 911 can provide instructions while you are with the person and you can also move around if necessary. Ask 911 what the expected response time is and whether other transportation should be considered.

### Have this information ready:

- City, address and, ideally, cross streets
- Specific location on site, e.g. room or floor number and entry codes
- Phone number they can call back to reach the check-in recipient or someone with them
- What happened? Be specific. (e.g. "Grandma fell..." off her chair is very different than off the roof).

## Cost Barriers

People may not be able to afford transportation to cooling centres, food while away from home, basic cooling supplies or higher utility bills from running air conditioning. Is there a friend they can stay with or who could give them a ride? Are there local organizations, like food banks or seniors' centres that can provide lower cost food?

## Cooling Spaces

Ideally, housing design and actions taken keep homes under 26°C (78°F), but if that is not possible people are advised to seek cool spaces in the community. People's bodies work very hard to stay cool when it is hot, and work even harder for people at higher risk from heat. Spending time in a cool space under 26°C (78°F) allows the body to rest and take a break from fighting the heat. It is recommended that people spend at least two hours at a time in a cool space, but ideally they should spend as much time as possible, especially in the evening when indoor temperatures peak. People may feel refreshed from the time spent in the cool space, but once someone leaves a cool space the risk of negative health impacts and heat-related illness returns. Even if a check-in recipient has visited a cooling space, once they return home heat check-ins, monitoring the indoor temperature and taking actions to cool their body should resume.

## COVID-19

Overall, for most people extreme heat poses a higher immediate risk of severe illness or death than COVID-19, and *certain* exposure to extreme heat is a higher risk than *potential* COVID-19 exposure and transmission. Protection from extreme heat should be prioritized. Most COVID-19 public health restrictions in British Columbia were lifted in April 2022. For organizations that serve populations at higher risk from COVID-19, infection prevention and control measures can complement cooling measures during heat events. If your organization is encountering challenges with this, please consult VCH Healthy Environments and Climate Change.

## Emergency Contacts

An emergency contact may be a reliable friend, family member, neighbour, building manager or someone who could help in an emergency. Did the check-in recipient provide this contact and consent? Can you share heat resources so the emergency contact knows how to help?

# QUICK FACTS

## Fans

Fans may not effectively reduce body temperatures or prevent heat-related illness in people at risk. Do not rely on fans as the primary cooling method. At night, when the outdoor temperature is cooler than indoor temperatures, consider using fans to bring cool air inside from windows. Kitchen and bathroom fans vent outside of living spaces and can be used to move hot air outside. For more information see the Fraser Health *Fans in Extreme Heat FAQ* on the Resources page.

## Heat Warnings and Extreme Heat Emergencies

Environment and Climate Change Canada issues both **Heat Warnings** (Level 1) and more severe **Extreme Heat Emergencies** (Level 2) across the province of BC. Different temperature thresholds are set for Heat Warnings in different regions of the province, as the relationship between heat and mortality differs. See Resources page for *BC Heat Alert and Response System* (BC HARS) link with more information on heat notifications and actions NGOs can take at each level.

## Liability

Under the BC [Good Samaritan Act](#), "a person who renders emergency medical services or aid to an ill, injured or unconscious person, at the immediate scene of an accident or emergency that has caused the illness, injury or unconsciousness, is not liable for damages for injury to or death of that person caused by the person's act or omission in rendering the medical services or aid unless that person is grossly negligent." The exceptions are people who act with a view to gain or people employed to provide medical services or aid. Heat check-ins happen in many contexts, some with staff or volunteers providing medical services, therefore we can not confirm if the Good Samaritan Act applies.

**IMPORTANT:** This Framework provides general information about supporting individuals at higher risk from heat. The information contained in this framework does not constitute legal or medical advice. Organizations utilizing this Framework are encouraged to seek legal guidance regarding their specific context and whether there are potential risks associated with performing check-in services or providing supports during heat events.

## Medications

Some medications or drugs can warm the body's temperature or disrupt some of the normal cooling mechanisms. Some medications require the person to limit their fluid intake or can contribute directly to dehydration. Advise the check-in recipient to check-in with their healthcare provider or pharmacist. HealthLink BC (8-1-1) has pharmacists available by phone from 9-5pm, 7 days a week.

## Mental Health

If you are concerned that the check-in recipient is suicidal or at risk for self-harm, please see the hotline numbers on the Heat Check-in Workflow Resource page. If you think the individual is experiencing mental health challenges, they or you can call HealthLink BC (8-1-1) healthcare navigators who can suggest services to connect them with.

# QUICK FACTS

## Mistrust of Emergency Services

Due to factors including systemic racism and stigma, some people may not trust emergency services and prefer not to access cooling centres or health services. Consider not only government-operating cooling centres, but also cool spaces in facilities where the individual feels safe, potentially including cultural centres, Friendship Centres or welcoming local spaces. Is there a friend or advocate that can go with them? As much as possible, explain the check-in protocols and ask the check-in recipient what their preferences are. For example, who would they like to follow up if they do not answer a phone call or knock? If they do not feel comfortable with police conducting a wellness check, is there an emergency contact or a building manager they prefer was contacted first?

## Mobility Challenges

People with mobility challenges may need assistance modifying their living space to keep cool, packing, and travelling to go to a cooler space. You may ask if there is a neighbour, family member, friend or volunteer who can assist them before and during a heat event. If possible, look for proactive steps your organization can take to work with people with mobility challenges so they can prepare and remain safely independent during heat events. Can your organization provide resources like air conditioning, or connections to other organizations with resources? As a back up, encourage packing a go-bag before the summer season, including non-perishable food and medications, for preparation to move to a cooler space. If someone with mobility challenges is experiencing heat-related illness, is physically unable to leave their space during a heat event and there is no one else to assist them, call 911. Emergency services have additional equipment and training for evacuations.

## People with Disabilities

When organizing or conducting heat check-ins, it is important to treat each person as an individual and to not make assumptions about abilities. If you are unsure, it is always better to respectfully and supportively ask. People with disabilities may be at increased risk of heat illness and benefit from supports, or not in need of a check-in or assistance. People may have visible or invisible disabilities, and people of all ages can have disabilities. People may have disabilities that impact them in various ways, that may change or come and go.

If possible, look for proactive steps your organization can take to work with people with disabilities so they can prepare and remain safely independent during heat events. Can your organization provide heat preparedness information, resources like air conditioning, or connections to other organizations with resources? Is there contact information you can provide in case circumstances change and they would like check-ins or assistance? Encourage people to have a "heat buddy," even if they feel prepared for the heat season, for support if circumstances change and they do need assistance.

## People Experiencing Homelessness

Gather and share information about nearby cooling centres, water fountains, washrooms and shelters, ideally on signage and pamphlets. Find out which nearby cooling centres accept pets and belongings. Could your organization set up a cooling space? Helpful things to provide people experiencing homelessness would include pamphlets on symptoms of heat illness, water bottles, hats, and lightweight breathable clothing. Access to water to use for cooling the body is also important (to wet clothes and towels to put on the body or fill basins for feet etc.).

# QUICK FACTS

## People Who Use Substances

Some substances can warm the body's temperature or disrupt some of the normal cooling mechanisms, as well as potentially making it challenging to monitor for symptoms. See the resources on the back of the Heat Check-In Workflow for Alcohol and Drug Information and Referral Service numbers. For non-emergency medical questions, call Healthlink BC (8-1-1). Towards the Heart also has resources for people who use substances during heat events and service providers who support them., see Resources page for link.

## Pets

While people may worry that pets are not allowed at cooling centres, this should not be an absolute barrier to accessing cool spaces. Many municipalities and non-government sites have policies to welcome pets to some or all cooling centres. Call ahead or check the website to find out which facilities allow pets. See Resources page for tips to keep pets safe during heat events.

## Refusing Care or Check-Ins

For someone refusing care or a check-in, explain that extreme heat is life threatening and the 98% of heat-related deaths in the 2021 heat dome were people in indoor residences. If they still refuse a check-in, respect their choice and move on. If they consent to a check-in but refuse to move to a cooler space or seek medical care, try to find out any barrier or concerns and help to brainstorm alternatives. If they have emergency symptoms (possible heat stroke), call 911. Explain the ambulance is coming to check on them but it is their choice whether they go with the paramedics.

## Residential Tenancy Regulations

A landlord may enter a tenant's rental unit if there is an emergency and entry is necessary to protect life. The landlord must show that their rationale was reasonable given the circumstances. For further information, see the Residential Tenancy Act and Residential Tenancy Regulations.

## Seniors

Older adults are less physically able to regulate their temperature and for some mental decline may affect the ability to recognize dehydration or over heating. They are (in general) also more likely to have mobility challenges, medical conditions and medications that increase heat risk. During heat events, older adults may need assistance travelling to services, keeping their space and themselves cool. Encourage them to make a plan, prepare for the heat season, have a pre-season visit with their health practitioner to ask about medications, and pack a go-bag before the season, including non-perishable food and medications, so they are prepared to move to a cooler space if need be.

If possible, look for proactive steps your organization can take to work with older adults so they can prepare and remain safely independent during heat events. Can your organization provide heat preparedness information, resources like air conditioning, or connections to other organizations with resources? Is there contact information you can provide in case circumstances change and they would like check-ins or assistance? Encourage people to have a "heat buddy," even if they feel prepared for the heat season, for support if circumstances change and they do need assistance.

# QUICK FACTS

## Staying Hydrated

Encourage people to drink water even if they are not thirsty, unless they have been specifically advised by a healthcare provider to limit fluids. If this is the case, recommend the individual call their healthcare provider, pharmacist or HealthLink BC to check. Some people may avoid fluids and need support to address the underlying concerns, such as challenges with toileting or access to bathrooms. For example, people with mobility challenges may avoid drinking because it is difficult or painful to get up for the bathroom. During a check-in, you may inquire about their urine to determine if they should drink more. Dark urine and decreased urination may indicate dehydration.

## Stigma

Do not make assumptions or dismiss that someone may be struggling due to substance use or mental health. EVERYONE deserves care and a check-in. In many communities, people have died in or close to public view. As long as it is safe for the staff or volunteer, it can save a life to check-in and see if help is needed.

## Translation

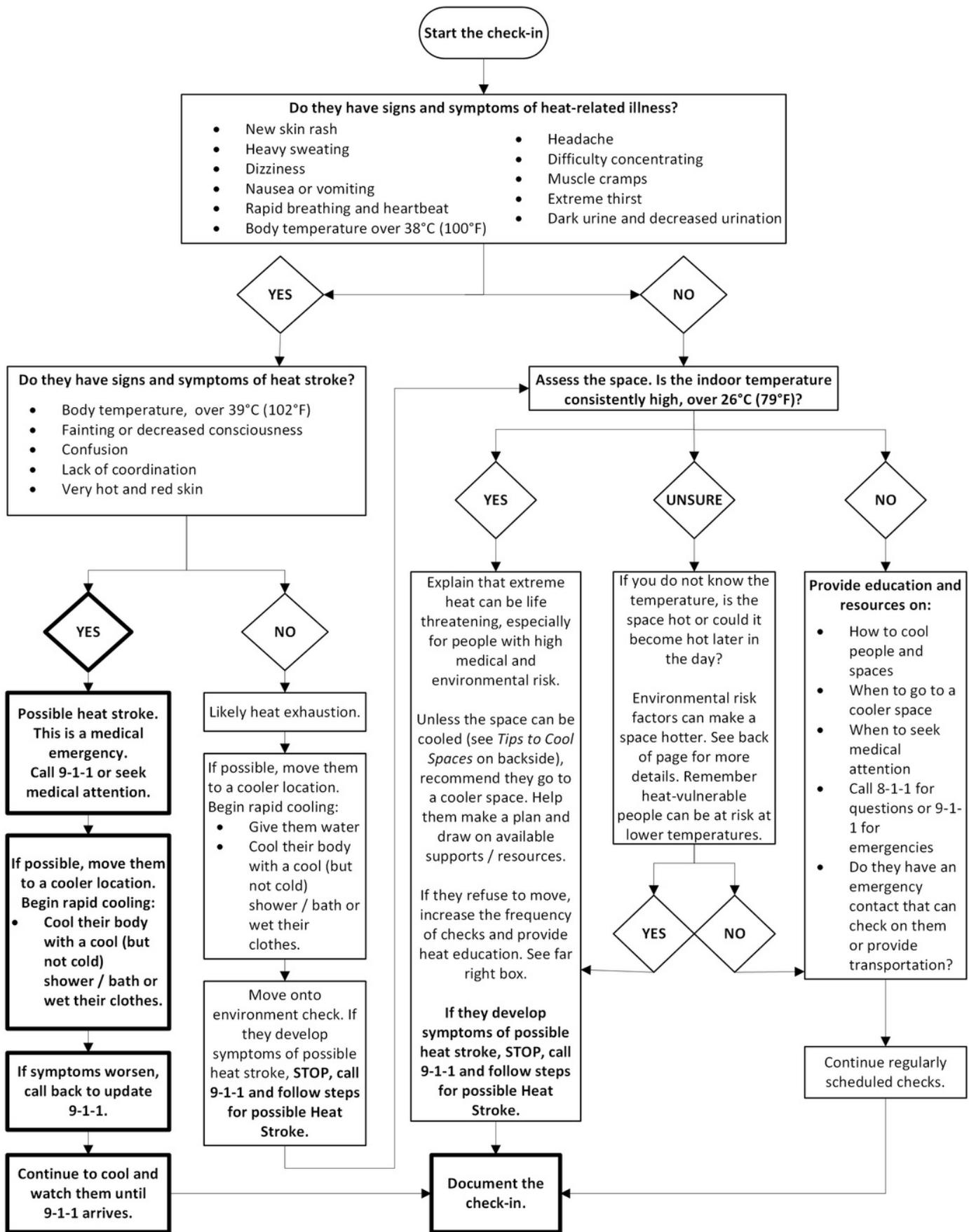
There are translated resources on the VCH heat website and BCCDC wildfire smoke website. Many of the services listed in the Resource pages have translators available. For in-person check-ins, consider bringing translated heat resources to reference. For phone check-ins, see if they have an emergency contact who can translate. Healthlink BC has access to translators and may be able to assist. For summer 2023, MOSAIC BC is providing heat check-ins for seniors who do not speak English or French and live in Metro Vancouver. Check out the [MOSAIC Extreme Weather Check-In Calls](#) registration page to learn more about the criteria and how to refer a community member.

## Transportation

Is there transit, shuttles, or a friend that can drive them to a cooling centre or health services? Do any local transit options have air conditioning? Does your organization or a partner provide taxi vouchers or have an available vehicle? Is there a closer air-conditioned building, like a mall or cultural centre?

## Wildfire Smoke

Many people at higher risk from heat are also at high risk for smoke. Access to cool and clean air are both important, but if only one can be prioritized, extreme heat poses a more immediate risk of death. For example, this could mean opening a window at night to cool an overheated home that has no air conditioning, even if there is smoke outside. The BC Centre for Disease Control wildfire smoke website has excellent resources, such as *Home-Made Box Air Fan Filters*, translated fact sheets for wildfire smoke preparedness and *Wildfire Smoke During Extreme Heat Events*. See Resources page for the link.



If you are unsure or have non-emergency medical questions, call 8-1-1 HealthLink BC. Available 24/7. For emergencies, call 9-1-1.

# INFORMATION AND RESOURCES FOR EXTREME HEAT CHECK-INS

## Environmental Risk Factors:

These factors may increase temperature and risk in indoor spaces. Even without these factors some spaces may still be dangerously hot.

- Lack of mechanical cooling, such as air-conditioning or a heat pump
- Higher floors of buildings
- Building floors directly under the roof
- South and/or west facing windows
- Large-sized windows
- Single pane windows
- No outside shade on windows
- No evening cross breeze
- Lack of neighbourhood trees and other green features

## Tips to Cool People:

- Go to a cool space (e.g. community center, library, café, home of a friend or family, sites with air conditioning).
- Use water to cool off. Take a cool shower, sit or put legs in a cool bath, wear a wet shirt, apply damp towels to the skin.
- Fans may not effectively reduce body temperatures or prevent heat-related illness in people at risk. **Do not rely on fans as the primary cooling method.**

## Tips to Cool Spaces:

- Can portable air conditioning be provided?
- If they have air conditioning, be sure to turn it on
- Keep shades and blinds closed during the day. If they don't have air conditioning, close windows during the day to trap the cooler air inside. At night, when the outdoor temperature is cooler than indoor temperatures, use fans to bring cool air inside from windows and use kitchen and bathroom fans to move hot air outside.
- Determine where the coolest part of the home or building is and see if it is possible to have the person spend the most time and sleep there.
- **Without air conditioning, different cooling measures such as adjusting window shades may only drop indoor temperature by a few degrees. Consistently high indoor temperatures can be life threatening. If in doubt, recommend that heat-vulnerable people go to a cooler space.**

See Quick Facts section for answers to common questions.

Translated heat information for the public:  
[www.vch.ca/heat](http://www.vch.ca/heat)



## Resource Numbers:

**Police, Fire, Ambulance:** 9-1-1

### Healthlink BC:

Find health information and services; or connect directly with a nurse, dietitian or pharmacist.

Open 24/7 and translators available

Call 8-1-1

Deaf or hearing-impaired (TTY): 7-1-1

### Crisis Intervention and Suicide Prevention:

Open 24/7 and translation available

BC Wide: 1-800-SUICIDE (784-2433)

Deaf or hearing-impaired (TTY): 1-866-872-0113

Senior's Distress Line: 604-872-1234

### Kuu-Us Crisis Line Society: Crisis services for Indigenous people across BC.

Adults/Elders line 250-723-4050

Youth line 250-723-2040

Toll free 1-800-588-8717

### Mental Health Support Line:

Provincial access to emotional support, information and resources.

Open 24/7.

604-310-6789

### Alcohol and Drug Information and Referral Service:

Open 24/7

Lower Mainland: 604-660-9382

Toll-free: 1-800-663-1441

### Shelter Information for Metro Vancouver, Fraser Valley, Squamish to Lillooet, Sunshine Coast:

Call or text 2-1-1

**Fill out this section with options from your community:**

**Food banks:**

**Taxi or transit options:**

**Grocery stores that deliver:**

**Pharmacies that deliver:**

**Cooling centre Information:**

**Phone number for NGO manager or other support:**

## EXAMPLE HEAT CHECK-IN SCRIPT

**IMPORTANT:** May be used as-is, or modified for organization and community needs. This example script provides general information about supporting individuals who are at increased risk during heat events but **does not constitute legal or medical advice.** Organizations are encouraged to seek legal guidance regarding their specific context and whether there are potential risks associated with performing check-in services or providing supports during heat events.

See the resources section of [VCH.CA/HEAT](https://vch.ca/heat) for the Microsoft Word version.

**Date:**

**Time:**

**Visitor or Caller:**

## INTRODUCTION

Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_. I work for \_\_\_\_\_.  
I am [visiting or calling] to check in and see how you are doing in this heat. Is now an okay time to talk?

### **Check community member's contact information:**

Name:

Current residential address (full address so you can inform 9-1-1, if needed):

Phone number:

### **Check emergency contact's information, if available:**

Name:

Relation to client:

Phone number:

## NOTES:

Date:

Time:

Visitor or Caller:

## CHECK THE PERSON

### Are you experiencing any of the following symptoms? (Possible Heat Exhaustion)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Heavy sweating                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Headache                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dizziness                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty concentrating           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nausea or vomiting                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Muscle Cramps                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rapid breathing and heartbeat                | <input type="checkbox"/> Extreme Thirst                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Body temperature over 38C (100F) if measured | <input type="checkbox"/> Dark Urine and decreased urination |

**NONE OF THE SYMPTOMS ABOVE:** move on to **CHECK THE SPACE** (section below)

**YES TO ANY SYMPTOMS ABOVE:** continue.

### Are you experiencing any of the following symptoms? (Possible Heat Stroke)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fainting or decreased consciousness | <input type="checkbox"/> Very hot and red skin                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Confusion                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Body temperature over 39 C (102 F) if measured |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of coordination                |   |

**NONE OF THE SYMPTOMS ABOVE:** follow steps below for **POSSIBLE HEAT EXHAUSTION**.

**YES TO ANY SYMPTOMS ABOVE:** follow steps below for **POSSIBLE HEAT STROKE**.

## POSSIBLE HEAT EXHAUSTION

- Recommend or help them move to a cooler location.
- Recommend or give them water or fluids.
- Recommend cooling their body with a cool shower, bath or wearing wet clothes.
- Move onto **CHECK THE SPACE** (below) but if they develop symptoms of possible heat stroke, STOP, call 9-1-1 and follow steps for possible heat stroke.

## POSSIBLE HEAT STROKE

- MEDICAL EMERGENCY: Call 9-1-1 or seek medical attention.**
- Recommend or help them move them to a cooler location **urgently**.
- Recommend immediately cooling their body with a cool shower, bath or wearing wet clothes.
- If symptoms worsen, call back to update 9-1-1
- Continue to watch them until 9-1-1 arrives.
- If possible, move to **CHECK THE SPACE** (below) while awaiting 9-1-1 and supporting the community member.

Date:

Time:

Visitor or Caller:

## CHECK THE SPACE

Is the indoor temperature high (over 26°C or 78°F)?

### YES: Indoor temperature is high

- Explain that extreme heat can be life threatening, especially for people at higher risk from heat:
  - Older adults, especially over 60 years
  - People with schizophrenia, depression, anxiety disorders or dementia
  - People who live alone
  - People with pre-existing health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease or respiratory disease
  - People with substance use disorders, including alcohol
  - People with limited mobility
  - People experiencing homelessness or who are marginally housed
  - People who are pregnant
  
- Can they use air conditioning or other cooling to drop their indoor temperature to under 26C or 79F?
  - YES:** Move on to **PROVIDE EDUCATION** and **WRAP UP** sections. Unless they have symptoms of possible heat stroke.
  - NO:** Recommend they go to a cooler space and help them make a plan.
  
- Do they have barriers to accessing cool spaces?** Brainstorm options or recommend they call 8-1-1. If they are unable or not willing to go to a cooler space, increase the frequency of checks and provide education (see **PROVIDE EDUCATION** section). If they develop symptoms of possible heat stroke, call 9-1-1 and follow steps for possible heat stroke. Take notes on barriers, to use in future follow-up calls and program planning:
  - No transportation
  - Mobility challenges
  - Do not feel safe
  - Other (add to notes):

### UNSURE: Assess the indoor temperature

Are there risk factors for high heat in the living space and building?

- No air-conditioning or heat pump
- Higher floor of building
- Live directly under the roof
- South and/or west facing windows (sun on windows during hot times)
- Large-size windows
- Single pane windows
- No outside shade on windows
- No evening cross breeze (e.g. Can't open windows)
- Lack of neighbourhood trees and other green features

More of these risk factors may lead to higher indoor temperatures and higher risk for heat-related illness. Even with no risk factors, spaces may still be dangerously hot. Does the space seem hot or could it become hot later in the day?

- YES:** follow steps for “**YES: Indoor temperature is high**” (above).
- No:** follow steps for “**NO: Indoor temperature is lower**” (below).

### NO: Indoor temperature is lower

Move on to **PROVIDE EDUCATION** and **WRAP UP** sections.

Date:

Time:

Visitor or Caller:

## PROVIDE EDUCATION

### How to cool people:

- Seek cooler indoor and outdoor spaces (i.e. a local community center, library, mall, or cool shaded park)
- Drink plenty of water and other liquids to stay hydrated, even if not thirsty
- Use water to cool off by taking a cool shower or putting a part of your body in a cool bath
- Wear a wet shirt or apply damp towels to your skin to cool down
- Wear loose fitting and light-coloured breathable clothing
- Limit activity, especially during the hottest hours of the day (generally 2 pm to 4 pm in B.C.)

### How to cool spaces:

- Close windows and pull indoor/outdoor shades/blinds around 10 am to trap the cooler air inside and block the sun
- Open windows and doors around 9-10 pm to let the cooler overnight air in
- Use one or more fans strategically to help move cooler air inside the home overnight
- Use exhaust fans, usually located in kitchens and bathrooms, to move warmer indoor air outside
- Consider getting an air conditioner for your home; if you have air conditioning be sure to turn it on

### When to go to a cooler space and nearby options:

- If indoor temperatures are consistently high and/ or they have symptoms of possible heat-related illness. For people at higher risk from heat, risk for heat-related illness may increase at indoor temperatures over 26 °C (78 °F) and may significantly increase at indoor temperatures over 31 °C (88 °F). Without air conditioning, cooling measures such as adjusting window shades can still drop indoor temperatures, but often only by a few degrees. If the space cannot be cooled with initial efforts, it is important to spend time in other cooler spaces.
- Share nearby cool spaces they can access.

### When to seek medical attention:

- For non-emergency medical questions call Healthlink BC, 8-1-1 (available 24/7, translators available).
- For emergencies, including symptoms of possible heat stroke, call 9-1-1.

## WRAP UP

- Is there friend, family member, neighbor or another person who can also check on them and/ or provide transportation to a cooler space if needed? [Recommend that they check in with this "heat buddy" at least once per day.]
- Do they know when the next check will be and who will be checking? Discuss a time that will work well for them.
- Do they have any other questions?