

How to be a Heat-Healthy Business Leader

Extreme Heat and Our Health

Our health region generally has moderate temperatures. However, as the climate warms, extreme heat can cause health impacts, resulting in heat-related illnesses such as heat exhaustion and heat stroke, as well as worsening pre-existing health conditions. Longer term exposure to dangerously hot conditions can lead to permanent disability or death.

Businesses can play a part in helping reducing heat-related illness. Fraser Health recognizes there are challenges for businesses to take all the steps they might wish during heat events. The following guidance is to support businesses in taking whatever actions are possible within their capacity. We thank the business community for all they do to contribute to safe and healthy communities, both routinely and during emergencies.

Who is at risk and what are risk factors

People who are elderly and those with mental health challenges may be at more risk than others because they may not notice that they are feeling thirsty or their body temperature is increasing.

This is partly due to how their bodies are working, and partly due to some of the medications they may be taking which change how the body responds to sun and heat. In addition, heat makes some pre-existing conditions worse. People who experience chronic kidney, heart and lung disease are usually more at risk of poor health impacts from extreme heat.

People who live in older buildings without air conditioning and people who don't leave home regularly are also at higher risk; having a safe cool space is important for vulnerable community members, but many may not have somewhere close by to go. **If your business is able to allow people to cool off, it could be a lifeline.**

Heat illness can cause dizziness, fainting, confusion, rapid breathing or heartbeat, lack of coordination, nausea and vomiting. If someone is struggling, try to move them to a cool place, apply cool water to their skin and call 911.

What are heat alerts?

A **Heat Warning** is issued when temperatures are expected to rise to 29°C (Vancouver) or 33°C (Abbotsford) or above for 2 days and do not fall significantly at night. This is associated with a 5% or greater increase in mortality.

An **Extreme Heat Emergency** is called when the criteria for a heat warning are met *and* temperatures rise day over day for 3 days or more. It is associated with a 20% increase in mortality or more.

What can you do as a business owner to be a heat healthy leader?

Tune in regularly to local weather forecasts and alerts so you know when risk is higher. Apps like WeatherCAN may be helpful to get alerts when weather warnings are issued.

Make small changes in your business to protect the public during heat alerts:

- Provide water if you are able.
- Train staff to recognize [the signs of heat illness](#).
- Post cooling advice and how to care for others (available on the Fraser Health website)
- If you have A/C, advertise if people are welcome to stay longer than usual. It can take a long time for people to cool off once they are overheated.
- Alter your pet policy to let people bring pets to your cool spot (people worry about leaving their pets in hot homes). Fraser Health can provide guidance.
- If you do not think all people will feel welcome, or there are limits on how many people can be in your space, know where there are community cooling spaces to which you can direct people.

During an extreme heat emergency:

Consider opening your doors as a cooling space for community members if you can.

How can staff be protected?

- Please see WorkSafeBC resources for more comprehensive guidance
- Know the signs of heat illness (above) and educate staff to be alert if staff or others are feeling ill
- If feasible, keep your business cool, somewhere between **22°C** and **26°C**, which can provide your staff with needed relief. **If it is 31 degrees or higher inside, it is dangerously hot for vulnerable people.**
- Where possible, allow change in work hours so staff who might be exposed to the heat can do their work during the coolest hours of the day.
- Increase breaks and encourage staff to drink plenty of water.

For more information, please see fraserhealth.ca/heatsafety or email healthybuiltenvironment@fraserhealth.ca