

Regional Heatwave Resilience Project

Building community preparedness



NEWSLETTER ARTICLE

TARGET AUDIENCE – FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Stage 1 Messages: General Community Awareness

These messages seek to raise general community awareness of heatwave / extreme heat impacts and preparedness and would be issued periodically during the lead up to and during summer.

Beat the Heat This Summer!

Many of us simply don't realise that extreme heat is a major cause of health problems every year in Australia, with heatwaves causing more hospitalisations and deaths than any other natural disaster.

In addition to heat stress, heat exhaustion and heat stroke, heatwaves can seriously worsen existing health conditions including cardiac disease, mental health and behavioural disorders, asthma and obstructive lung conditions.

This summer, it is time we all started to take heat related illness seriously.

Babies and young children are among those most at risk from heatwaves and extreme heat conditions.

This is because they cannot adjust to changes in temperature as well as adults. They sweat less, which reduces their ability to cool down, and they generate more heat during exercise than adults. This puts them at greater risk of overheating and developing a heat-related illness, or making existing conditions worse.

Families with young children should take extra steps to make sure their children stay well through a heat wave:

- Make sure babies, children and breastfeeding mums are getting plenty of fluids.
- Breast or bottle feed babies more often (babies are getting enough fluids if they have 6-8 pale wet nappies in a 24-hour period)
- Offer older children drinks, preferably water, more often.
- Dress the family in cool, loose clothing
- Never leave people or pets in the car
- Plan active or outdoor activities for the coolest times of day
- If going out in the sun, wear a hat and sunscreen, even if only for short periods.



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Parents and carers should know the signs of heat stress in children:

- looking unwell and being more irritable than usual
- having pale and clammy skin
- being sleepy and floppy
- having fewer wet nappies than usual or dark urine
- refusing to breast/bottle feed
- having intense thirst and dry skin, mouth or eyes
- a soft spot on the baby's head (fontanelle) may be lower than usual.

If children show any of these signs take steps to prevent it reaching dangerous levels:

- move the child to a cool area
- remove any extra clothes
- try to give the baby or child extra drinks
- cover the child or baby with cool damp cloths or sponge them down with water

If you think your baby or young child is suffering from heat related illness, don't wait - seek urgent medical advice.

Also, if you have a child that is already sick, especially with fever, vomiting or diarrhoea, they will need extra attention to make sure they stay hydrated during hot weather.

To make your home more comfortable during the hottest part of the day keep windows, blinds and curtains closed to keep the heat out of the house. If you have an air conditioner, reduce running costs by setting it to 24 degrees, and turning it on before the room heats up so it doesn't have to work as hard.

Children might also enjoy some old school ways to stay cool, like putting their feet in a basin of cool water, sucking on ice cubes and putting bowls of ice in front of a fan to make a cool breeze.

If it gets too hot at home have a plan of where else you might go to stay cool and how to get there safely. Swimming pools, public libraries, community centres and galleries are great low-cost places to beat the heat during the hottest part of the day, as are shopping centres, cinemas and restaurants.

[Freely accessed public facilities registered as 'Cool Spots' in the (INSERT COUNCIL AREA NAME) include (INSERT FACILITY NAMES) and will be open as normal (INSERT OPERATING HOURS)]

To find out more about ways to beat the heat and be prepared during a heatwave visit www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/beattheheat



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