

# Extreme Heat & Wildfire Smoke Staff Resource

VCH Staff Resource for Patient/ Client Information| May 2025

## Extreme Heat: Key public health messages

- **Take actions to cool your space** by closing the windows and blinds during the day, using an air conditioner if you have it, or a [cool kit](#). If your space gets too hot, visit cool indoor spaces with air conditioning (e.g. libraries or malls), or cool outdoor spaces (e.g. parks). Learn more tips to cool your space at [www.vch.ca/heat](http://www.vch.ca/heat).
- **The most dangerous part of heat waves are high indoor temperatures, particularly at home.** Risk of heat-related illness increases over 26°C (78°F), and temperatures over 31°C (88°F) are dangerous for people at higher risk.
- **Find a heat buddy.** Sometimes it can be difficult to notice when we are too hot or dehydrated, or to get to a cooler space when needed. Plan to check on each other and the temperature inside your homes regularly during a heat wave.
- **Everyone should have a plan for heat season.** PreparedBC has an [Extreme Heat Preparedness Guide](#) you can fill in and it is available in multiple languages.
- See [www.vch.ca/heat](http://www.vch.ca/heat) for more information.

## Wildfire smoke: Key public health messages

- **Wildfire smoke can have both short-term and longer-lasting health impacts.** Wildfire smoke contains tiny particles of pollution that travel deep into your lungs and blood stream when you breathe them in. This causes irritation and inflammation throughout the body.
- **The best way to protect your health from wildfire smoke is to spend time in filtered indoor air.** Close the windows and use a [portable air cleaner with HEPA filters](#) or a [do-it-yourself air cleaner](#) (minimum MERV 13 filter). If you don't have an air cleaner or your home is too hot, spend time in air-conditioned public spaces (most likely to have cleaner air).
- **Air quality can change quickly. Check the local air quality online throughout the day.** Use the [Air Quality Health Index \(AQHI\)](#) to help you decide about outdoor activities.
- See [www.vch.ca/wildfiresmoke](http://www.vch.ca/wildfiresmoke) for more information



## Resources for the Public

Please share with clients, and post around clinics, workspaces, or on TV screens. PreparedBC will [mail health teams](#) free printed copies of their [guides](#) and has [social media toolkits](#).

### Heat

- [VCH Extreme Heat webpage](#). Public health guidance for heat events, and many heat resources.
- VCH /FHA [Extreme Heat Poster](#) People at risk, signs of heat-related illness and recommended actions (translations available).
- PreparedBC [Extreme Heat Preparedness Guide](#) Step-by-step guide to making a plan for heat events (translations available).
- NCEH [Health Checks During Extreme Heat Events](#) Simple guide on how to check in with someone during a heat event, symptoms to look for, and actions to take (translations available).
- VCH/ FHA: [Fan FAQ](#). Fans should not be used as the primary cooling method for people at higher risk for heat-related illness. Read this FAQ to learn more.
- VCH/ CoV [Cool Kits](#): Everyday items to help cool off at home (translations available).
- First Nations Health Authority [Be Prepared for Hot Weather handout](#).
- First Nations Health Authority [Stay Safe During Extreme Heat Events Infographic](#)

### Wildfire smoke

- [VCH Wildfire Smoke webpage](#). Public health guidance for wildfire smoke, how to buy or make an air cleaner, how to check local air quality, and many wildfire smoke resources.
- VCH/ FHA: [Wildfire Smoke Poster](#) People at risk, signs of smoke related illness and recommended actions (translations available).
- VCH [Protect Yourself from Wildfire Smoke Postcard](#) How to check local air quality and use the Air Quality Health Index, especially in smaller communities outside urban areas.
- VCH [How to choose and use portable air cleaners](#) checklist. Not all air cleaners protect from wildfire smoke and they need to be maintained to be effective.
- BREATHE: [DIY Air Cleaner Instructions](#). Step-by-step instructions, shopping list, and videos on how to make a lower cost, evidence based do-it-yourself air cleaner (translations available).
- BCCDC: [Wildfire Smoke Factsheets](#) on topics such as [health effects of wildfire smoke](#), [wildfire smoke during extreme heat events](#), and [wildfire smoke and outdoor exercise](#).



## Resources for Specific Populations

### People with medical conditions:

- Towards the Heart (BCCDC): [Guide for people living with Schizophrenia](#) and [Supporting people living with schizophrenia](#)
- BC Ministry of Health: [Medications and Heat](#). Poster or hand out for people taking medications.
- Legacy for Airway Health, UBC, VCHRI: [Wildfire Smoke and Extreme Heat Action Plan](#). Planning tool for clients at risk from wildfire smoke and heat events. Healthcare worker guides included. available explaining how to support a client to fill out the plan.
- BC Hydro [Free Air Conditioning Program](#). For 2025, this program is only available for clients connected to home health, priority populations, mental health and substance use.

### Older adults:

- FHA: [Summer Heat Safety for Seniors and People with Medical Conditions](#)
- Red Cross: [Emergency Preparedness for Older Adults: Planning Guide](#) and [Quick Guide](#).

### People who use substances:

- Towards the Heart (BCCDC): [What to do during extreme heat: Guide for service providers](#)
- Towards the Heart (BCCDC): [Guide for people who use substances](#) and [Using substances during extreme heat](#)
- Towards the Heart (BCCDC): [Getting prescriptions and carries during extreme weather](#)

### Infants, children, caregivers, and pregnant people:

- VCH: [Wildfire Smoke Guide for Schools and Childcare Facilities](#)
- Ministry of Health: [Asthma Action Plan for Children Age 1-5](#)
- BCCDC: [Wildfire smoke and pregnancy](#)
- VCH: [Wildfire smoke awareness posters and postcards](#) for families and pregnant people
- VCH: [Extreme Heat Guide for Schools and Childcare Facilities](#)
- Health Canada: [Staying Healthy in the Heat Infographic Brochure](#)
- Healthlink BC: [Heat Related Illness in Infants and Young Children](#)
- Healthlink BC: [Safety for Infants and Young Children During Extreme Heat](#)
- FHA: [Window Safety for Children](#)



## Resources for Staff

Please share with colleagues and post in staff rooms, as applicable.

For answers to common questions, see the [VCH Extreme Heat and Wildfire Smoke FAQ](#).

### Heat:

- BC Ministry of Health: [Medications and Heat](#).
- Health Canada: [Extreme Heat and Human Health; Information for Pharmacists and Pharmacist Technicians](#).
- VCH: [Extreme Heat and Community Care Facilities](#). Guidance for long-term care, assisted living, community living, hospice, mental health, substance use, acquired injury, and child/ youth care facilities.
- Health Canada: [Extreme Heat Events Guidelines: Technical Guide for Health Care Workers](#)
- Health Canada: [Health Facilities Preparation for Extreme Heat](#)
- Health Canada: [Community Care During Extreme Heat](#)
- Health Canada: [Acute Care During Extreme Heat](#)

### Wildfire smoke:

- VCH: [Wildfire Smoke and Community Care Facilities](#). Guidance for long-term care, assisted living, community living, hospice, mental health, substance use, acquired injury, and child/ youth care facilities.
- BCCDC: [Wildfire Smoke During Heat Events](#). What to do when there is potentially conflicting priorities – do you prioritize heat or smoke?
- Health Canada: [Human health effects of wildfire smoke](#).
- Legacy for Airway Health, UBC, VCH Research Institute: [Wildfire Smoke and Extreme Heat Action Plan](#). Health care worker guide explaining how to support a client to fill out their plan.

### Sign up for heat and air quality warnings:

- **Email:** Sign up for [EC Alert Me](#) public weather alerts by email. Select the communities and weather events you would like to be notified about.
- **Smartphone:** Download the [WeatherCAN](#) app for public weather alerts on your cell phone. Select the communities you would like to be notified about.
- **Wildfire smoke information outside urban areas:** Smaller communities may be far away from government air quality monitors used by mainstream weather services. For more accurate local wildfire smoke levels check [AQMap.ca](#) to see if there are air quality monitors in your community.
- ❖ **Internal:** Health Emergency Management BC notifies impacted areas within the health system.

