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Safety for infants and young children during extreme heat

Heat and humidity can go up in the summer months, making it feel hotter outside than normal. Extreme heat happens when the heat and humidity are much higher than we would expect during a normal summer day.

Extreme heat can be harmful to anyone's health, but infants (0-1 year) and young children (1-5 years) may be at a higher risk of heat-related illness, especially if they do not have access to a cool indoor environment.

Heat can build up indoors when the outdoor temperatures are high. Exposure to indoor heat over 31C for long periods can be dangerous. If it gets very hot in your home, plan to go somewhere cooler if possible.

What can you do to prevent heat-related illness?

Keep cool inside

- Turn on air conditioning (AC) if you have it. A temperature of less than 26°C is safe for most people
- Indoor temperatures over 31°C for long periods can be dangerous
- Get a digital room thermometer to help know when your home is getting too hot.
- If you do not have an air-conditioned space in your home, consider staying with friends or family who have air-conditioning if your house gets too hot.
- Plan cool activities: find play areas in community spaces that are air conditioned, such as the library or a community/ recreation centre.
- Close windows during the heat of the day to trap cooler air inside
- Cover windows by using shutters, blinds, drapes, blankets or sheets to keep sun out
- If the temperature drops at night and it is safe, open windows to let cool air in
- Turn off lights and electronic devices that are not in use to avoid any extra heat
- Use your oven or stove as little as possible
- Do not point a fan directly at your infant or child as this can dehydrate them. Fans may not help prevent heat-related illness if the indoor temperatures are above 35 °C
- Give your child a supervised, normal room temperature bath or sponge bath

Keep cool outside

During an extreme heat event, you can lower the risk of heat-related illness by keeping infants and young children in a cool space indoors during the hottest hours of the day. If they must be outside, you can reduce their risk of heat-related illness by:

- Dressing them in light-coloured, loose-fitting, lightweight clothing; a wide-brimmed hat with no ties; and UV protective sunglasses. Although light-coloured clothing is recommended to keep cool, keep in mind that it does not provide as much protection from the sun's rays as darker-coloured clothing
- For kids aged 6 months or older, applying sunscreen with UVA and UVB protection and a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of 30 or more to exposed skin. Sunscreen won't protect your infant or child from the heat, but a sunburn can make heat-related illnesses worse or more likely to occur
- It is safest to keep babies younger than 12 months out of direct sunlight.
- Offering regularly scheduled breaks in the shade or in a cool area inside
- Go to large parks that have water features and lots of trees as they may be cooler and breezier. You can also look for splash pads, waterparks, or pools that are age-appropriate.
- Using a more open-aired stroller that has mesh panelling or removing the back panel

may help to circulate air around your child. Keeping your infant shaded in their stroller by using an umbrella will also help keep them cool

Keep Hydrated

0-6 months

- Offer more feedings of breast/chest milk or formula than usual.
- Put a towel, sheet or diaper in between you and your infant during feeding times. A dampened washcloth in the crook of your arm may also be helpful
- Try breast/chest-feeding while laying down

If you are breast/chest-feeding you also need to stay well hydrated; try having a cool non-alcoholic, low sugar drink during every feed in addition to other beverages throughout the day.

6 months and older

- Offer more feedings of breast/chest milk or formula than usual, as well as small amounts of water between feedings. You can also offer extra "snacks" with breast/chest milk to keep them well hydrated.

1 year and older

- Regularly offer water to your child as their main drink, even if they aren't thirsty. Consider offering water in a variety of ways such as by water bottle or cup with a straw as age-appropriate and offer foods with extra fluid content such as fruit and dairy smoothies.
- Aim for your child to drink 1 to 1.5L (4-6 cups) of water daily
- Avoid sugary, carbonated, and caffeinated drinks to reduce the risk of dehydration.

Car Safety

- Never leave your infant or child alone in the car, even if the windows are open. Temperatures can quickly become deadly, overheating infants and young children
- Use sunshades on windows to block the sun during car rides. Covering a car seat with a rug, towel, blanket, or baby wrap may restrict air circulation around your child and increase the risk of heat-related illness
- Dress babies in one layer, with no hats or foot coverings, like socks and shoes
- Provide extra feeds for your child during long trips in a car as car air conditioners may cause dehydration
- Stop and wake your baby for feeds if they become sleepy while travelling in the hot weather

Keeping cool during sleep

- Have infants and young children sleep in the coolest room in the house, even if this is not their bedroom
- Sleep in the same room as your infant for the first 6 months. This is safest for them, whether for naps during the day or at night
- Have your infant or young child wear only a diaper to bed. This may help them stay cool and feel more comfortable
- For infants, keep the sleep surface free of extra padding (like crib bumpers) or heavy blankets. A firm crib mattress is recommended for safer sleep and may also help to keep air circulating around your baby
- For children, sleeping on a firm mattress and using a firm pillow may help keep them cooler during sleep

Remove waterproof mattress covers as they often promote sweating. For extremely hot weather, consider other options for bedwetting such as nighttime pull-up diapers, using a towel on top of the mattress, or using a disposable absorbent mat.

It is important to continue to follow safe sleep practices during an extreme heat event to reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). For more information, visit: HealthLinkBC File #46 Sleep related infant death.

BC's heat alert warning system

The B.C. Heat Alert and Response System, or BC HARS, defines two categories of heat events – heat warning and the more dangerous extreme

heat emergency – triggered by specific temperature ranges to initiate recommended response actions. Environment and Climate Change Canada issue the alerts and you can sign up to get heat push notifications to your smartphones through the WeatherCAN app for any/all of the pre-selected locations.

For more information

For more information on extreme heat, visit: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery/embc/preparedbc/preparedbc-guides/preparedbc_extreme_heat_guide.pdf.

For more information on keeping children cool, visit: https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/hc-sc/documents/services/publications/healthy-living/keep-children-cool-extreme-heat/extreme-heat-brochure-keep-children-cool-en.pdf.

For more information on sun safety visit:

- HealthLinkBC File #26 Sun safety for children
- HealthLink File #35c Heat-related illness in infants and young children
- Toddler's First Steps

For more information on safer sleep for infants and children, visit:

- Baby's Best Chance: Sleep
- HealthLinkBC File #107 Safe sleeping for babies
- Perinatal Services BC: Safer Infant Sleep
- Toddler's First Steps: Sleep and Your Toddler

For more information about breast/chest-feeding, visit:

- Baby's Best Chance (pg. 93)
- HealthLinkBC File #70 Breastfeeding or Chestfeeding

For more safety information on how to keep pregnant or early postpartum individuals safe from extreme heat, visit: HealthLink File #35a Safety for the perinatal population during extreme heat.

For recommendations on how to make fluids more fun, visit: https://appetitetoplay.com/healthy-eating/tips-ideas/hydration-kids