

# How to stay safe in extreme heat

OFFICIAL

## Summary

- Stay cool: Use air conditioning and/or a fan. Wear light and loose-fitting clothing. Keep your skin wet, using a spray bottle or damp sponge. Take cool showers or foot baths.
- Stay hydrated: During days of extreme heat, keep drinking water, even before you feel thirsty, especially if outdoors or performing physical activity.
- Plan ahead: Stock up on essential food and medications before the heat arrives. Cancel or reschedule activities for the coolest part of the day. Avoid exercising and being outdoors in extreme heat.
- Check in with family, friends and neighbours. Let them know you are OK or if you might need assistance. Check in with those who may need your support during days of extreme heat.
- Monitor the weather forecast and the Bureau of Meteorology Heatwave warnings online or via the Bureau's app. Subscribe to receive Department of Health heat health warnings.

## Heat-related health problems

During extreme heat, it is easy to become dehydrated or for your body to overheat.

Heat can cause serious and potentially fatal health problems such as heat exhaustion and heatstroke, trigger sudden events like heart attack or stroke, or worsen existing medical conditions like kidney or lung disease.

Extreme heat can affect anybody. [Those more at-risk](#) include people over the age of 65, babies and young children, pregnant women, people with acute or chronic health problems, people who are socially isolated and people with limited ways to keep cool.

## Staying safe in extreme heat

Prevent heat-related health problems by staying cool and staying hydrated. Plan ahead and check in with others.

### Stay cool:

- Use air conditioning and/or a fan.
- Wear light and loose-fitting clothing.
- Keep your skin wet using a spray bottle or damp sponge.
- Take cool showers or foot baths with cool tap water.
- Use ice packs or wrap ice cubes in a damp towel and drape around your neck.
- Close blinds or curtains to block heat entering your home.
- Use stoves and ovens as little as possible as these can heat up your home.
- If you need to go out, consider spending time in an air-conditioned building such as a shopping centre or public library.

- Cars can get dangerously hot very quickly – never leave babies, young children or pets alone in a car even with the air conditioning on.

## Stay hydrated:

- Keep drinking water, even before you feel thirsty, especially if outdoors and doing physical activity. If your doctor has asked that you limit your fluid intake, ask them how much water you should drink during extreme heat.
- Whenever you leave home, always take a water bottle with you.
- Watch for signs of dehydration like feeling thirsty, lightheaded, having a dry mouth, tiredness, having dark-coloured, strong-smelling urine or passing less urine than usual (You can check your urine using the urine chart on the University of Sydney's [Heatwatch](#)).

## Plan ahead:

### Before summer

- Check that your fan and air-conditioner works well. Have your air-conditioner serviced if needed. Ensure the filters, pads and air vents are clean.
- See your doctor to check if changes are needed to your medicines during extreme heat.
- In case of power failure make a kit that includes a torch, battery-operated radio, fully charged mobile phone or battery back-up, food items that don't require refrigeration, medications, plenty of drinking water and other essential items.
- Look at the things you can do to make your home cooler such as installing reflecting coating to your roof, insulation, glazing, external window awnings, shade cloths or external blinds, and planting trees to provide shade around the house.
- Learn about safe [food](#) and medicine storage during extreme heat, and especially during and after a power outage.
- Learn the signs of [heat-related illness](#) so you can respond quickly if you or someone you know becomes sick.

### Before the forecast heat arrives

- Stock up on food, water and medicines so you don't have to go out in the heat.
- Fill ice trays in your freezer or put some cool-packs in the refrigerator or freezer.
- Make a plan for keeping in regular contact with friends and neighbours when it is very hot in case you or they need help.
- Make sure you have contact details for your doctor, pharmacist, Nurse-on-Call or other source of good health advice.

### During extreme heat

- Cancel or reschedule non-essential outings or activities.
- Plan essential activities for the coolest part of the day.
- If you have to go outside, take a water bottle with you, seek shade, and wear a hat and sunscreen for skin protection.
- Keep up to date with weather forecasts and warnings – via TV or radio.
- Check the [Bureau of Meteorology](#) heatwave forecast online or via their app, and subscribe to receive [Heat health warnings](#) from the Department of Health.

## Check in with family, friends and neighbours

- A quick call can make a big difference.
- Let family, friends and neighbours know you are OK or if you might need some assistance.
- Check in with those at increased risk or who may need your support during days of extreme heat.

## Older people and extreme heat

People over 65 years are more susceptible to heat-related health problems because their bodies are less able to adjust to changes in temperature. They are also more likely to have underlying medical conditions and be take medicines that increase their risk.

Older people with medical conditions or taking medicines should ask their doctor about heat-related health problems and any adjustments, changes or special precautions they should take during periods of extreme heat or power failures.

## Children and extreme heat

Babies and young children are more susceptible to heat-related health problems and need special care during extreme heat.

- [Never leave babies or young children in cars.](#)
- Offer additional breast- or bottle-feeding to babies during extreme heat and encourage children to drink regularly. See The [Australian Breastfeeding Association](#) .
- Breast-feeding mothers should also make sure they drink plenty of fluids.
- Do not leave your baby to sleep in a pram in extreme heat as airflow is restricted.
- Babies in strollers can be kept cool by covering the stroller with a moist muslin/cotton cloth, preferably with a battery-operated clip-on fan if available. Keep the covering wet with a spray bottle.

## How you can help others

Help family, friends and neighbours, especially those [more at-risk of heat-related health problems:](#)

- Check in with them regularly to see how they're coping, especially if they are living alone.
- Encouraging them to do things that will keep them cool and stay hydrated.
- Call them at least once on any extreme heat day and ask them to call you if they have any concerns or just to check in.
- Offering to help by doing shopping or other errands so they can avoid the heat, if it's safe for you to do so.
- Take them somewhere cool (e.g., a shopping centre, a cinema, a library) if it's safe to do so or have them stay the night if they are unable to stay cool in their home.
- Seek medical care immediately if they are showing any signs of heat-related health problems (see Where to get help below).

## Where to get help

- In an emergency, call triple zero (000)
- The [Translating and Interpreting Service \(TIS National\)](#) is available (24 hours, 7 days) for callers who speak other languages. Call [131 450](#).

- Your [GP \(doctor\)](#) – if you, or someone you know, may be suffering from a heat-related health problems
- [NURSE-ON-CALL](#) Tel. [1300 60 60 24](#) – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- Contact the [Victorian Virtual Emergency Department](#) – for non-life-threatening emergencies
- [Maternal and Child Health Line](#), Victoria Tel. [132 229](#) (24 hours)
- [Health Translations Directory](#) – extreme heat information in community languages.