



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

July 22, 2022

**NEWS RELEASE**

**Seniors Advocate urges seniors and caregivers to prepare for rising temperatures**

VICTORIA – Hot and dry weather is forecast for many regions of B.C. and rising temperatures may put vulnerable seniors at risk. Currently, forecasted temperatures are not expected to rise to the level of an extreme heat emergency, however, they are forecast to be higher than normal and will create heat wave conditions in certain areas similar to what is experienced during most summers in B.C.

With higher temperatures expected, it is recommended that seniors take some additional precautions and family, friends and neighbours are encouraged to check in on older people to ensure they are keeping cool and well hydrated.

The dual focus during high temperatures is to keep the room cool and to keep the body cool.

To cool rooms:

- Ensure the blinds are lowered and/or drapes are closed during the heat of the day. Keep the windows closed until the temperature outside is cooler than the temperature inside. When temperatures drop in the evening, open the windows, blinds and drapes and let the cool air in.
- If you have air conditioning, ensure it is turned on, working properly and all windows and doors are closed.
- If you do not have air conditioning, have fans running and open doors to the corridor of the building if it will help circulate cooler air.
- If you are having difficulty cooling the room, consider going to a cooler location such as an air conditioned shopping mall or visit family or friends who have a cooler home.

To cool the body:

- Ensure you drink plenty of cool liquids and eat as much as possible; appetite may decrease during the hot weather but keeping up fluid intake is crucial.
- Apply a cold cloth to your face, wrists and back of the neck. Placing wrists under cold running water or taking a cool or tepid shower can also be helpful.
- Ensure you wear cool cotton or other natural, breathable clothing.
- Avoid going outside in the daytime. If you must go out, ensure you are protected from the sun with clothing, sunscreen and a wide brimmed hat. Older skin is more vulnerable to sunburn.

“I encourage seniors and their loved ones to ensure they are prepared for the hot weather,” said Isobel Mackenzie, BC Seniors Advocate. “Please check regularly – in person if possible – on elderly family members and friends to make sure they can stay cool and hydrated. If the forecasted heat wave develops into an extreme heat emergency, the Province will issue an Extreme Heat Emergency Alert which triggers a series of actions by public health officials and local and provincial governments to inform the public and keep people safe. An extreme heat emergency may require people to move family members to a cooling centre or get an air conditioning unit into their home.”

If someone is experiencing unusual confusion, vomiting or lethargy, immediately call 9-1-1 or go to the nearest emergency department. If you are concerned about your elderly family member or neighbour and you cannot make contact with them, call 9-1-1 for direction.

The B.C. Extreme Heat Preparedness Guide has tips about how to stay safe when temperatures rise: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/safety/emergency-management/preparedbc/know-your-hazards/severe-weather/extreme-heat>

If you know a senior who needs help with getting groceries, meals or medication, call 2-1-1 to connect with the local Better at Home agency who can offer services and support.

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The Office of the Seniors Advocate is an independent office of the provincial government with a mandate of monitoring seniors' services and reporting on systemic issues affecting seniors. The office also provides information and referral to seniors and their caregivers by calling toll-free 1 877 952-3181, BC211, via email at [info@seniorsadvocatebc.ca](mailto:info@seniorsadvocatebc.ca), Canada Post and the OSA web site <https://www.seniorsadvocatebc.ca/>.

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## **BACKGROUNDER**

In 2021, B.C. experienced record high temperatures in what was referred to as a “heat dome” and an “extreme heat emergency”. This weather event was different from the usual heat waves B.C. generally experiences each summer and was a significant risk to public health.

In response to the unprecedented emergency heat event of 2021, the provincial government undertook a number of reviews and developed a system of measures that will provide enhanced supports in the event B.C. experiences another extreme heat emergency. Extreme heat emergencies are forecast to likely occur once or twice a decade, compared to heatwaves which are forecast to occur two to three times each summer and are considered a moderate risk to public health.

There are health measures that people can take to manage during a heat wave that are not sufficient during an extreme heat emergency. It is much more difficult to cool rooms and homes during an extreme heat emergency, therefore some people must temporarily relocate to a cooler location or have mechanical ventilation, such as an air conditioner, available in their homes.

Emergency Management BC and Environment and Climate Change Canada are monitoring temperatures over the summer to determine if people need to prepare for an extreme heat emergency event. If an extreme heat emergency event is expected, the Province will issue an Extreme Heat Emergency Alert using the Emergency Broadcast System, similar to what is done in the case of an Amber Alert or tsunami warning. This alert to the public will also trigger a response from local governments and health authorities that may include:

- opening cooling centers for extended hours (including possibly overnight);
- identifying vulnerable populations and outreach to those most at risk, and offering transportation to cooling centers and other supports;
- increased staffing of BC Ambulance Service to meet anticipated rising demand; and
- regular public communication on the status of the extreme heat emergency and recommended actions.