

DID YOU KNOW THAT GLOBALLY, 2016 was the hottest year on record, with 2019 being a close second? Over the last 140 years, since recordkeeping began, the past 5 years have been the warmest on record.¹ Many places across Canada experience a high number of "heat waves". These extreme heat events involve high temperatures and sometimes high humidity, which can cause illnesses such as heat stroke.² Being aware of extreme heat days, and the risks associated with them, may help prevent serious impacts to you, your family's and even your pet's health. Continue reading for some valuable information on how to manage a heat wave, whether travelling on vacation, or simply doing physical activities outdoors.

Heat waves and health risks

Weather conditions play a vital role in how the body regulates temperature, especially through the evaporation of sweat. Just as windy days can help to cool you quickly, high humidity can slow the evaporation of sweat and lead to increased body temperature.² Heat illnesses are mainly caused by prolonged exposure to extreme heat.² Extreme heat events can affect you rapidly and lead to a number of different illnesses, sometimes causing long-term health problems. Heat related illnesses can include:²

- Heat edema (swelling of hands, feet, and ankles)
- Heat rash
- Heat cramps (muscle cramps)
- Heat fainting
- Heat exhaustion
- Heat stroke

Who is at risk?

Health risks from heat waves are greatest in the following people:

Older adults:

- Due to being on medications that may worsen ability to adapt to heat
- Living alone and not having a support system to get help in

People who work or are

- Especially people who work in construction, or those who exercise/do demanding physical activity outdoors

Chronic illness/special medication:

- Especially those with breathing difficulties, heart problems, psychiatric conditions

Infants and young children:

- Due to the unique way their bodies work compared to adults, and their high dependency on caregivers
- Case of emergency during an extreme heat event



Prevention tips

Prepare for the heat: know the signs and symptoms of heat illness and regularly monitor the local weather forecast and alerts. Stay cool and drink plenty of liquids; water is best.³

Wear loose-fitting fabrics and light-coloured clothing made from breathable fabric.⁴

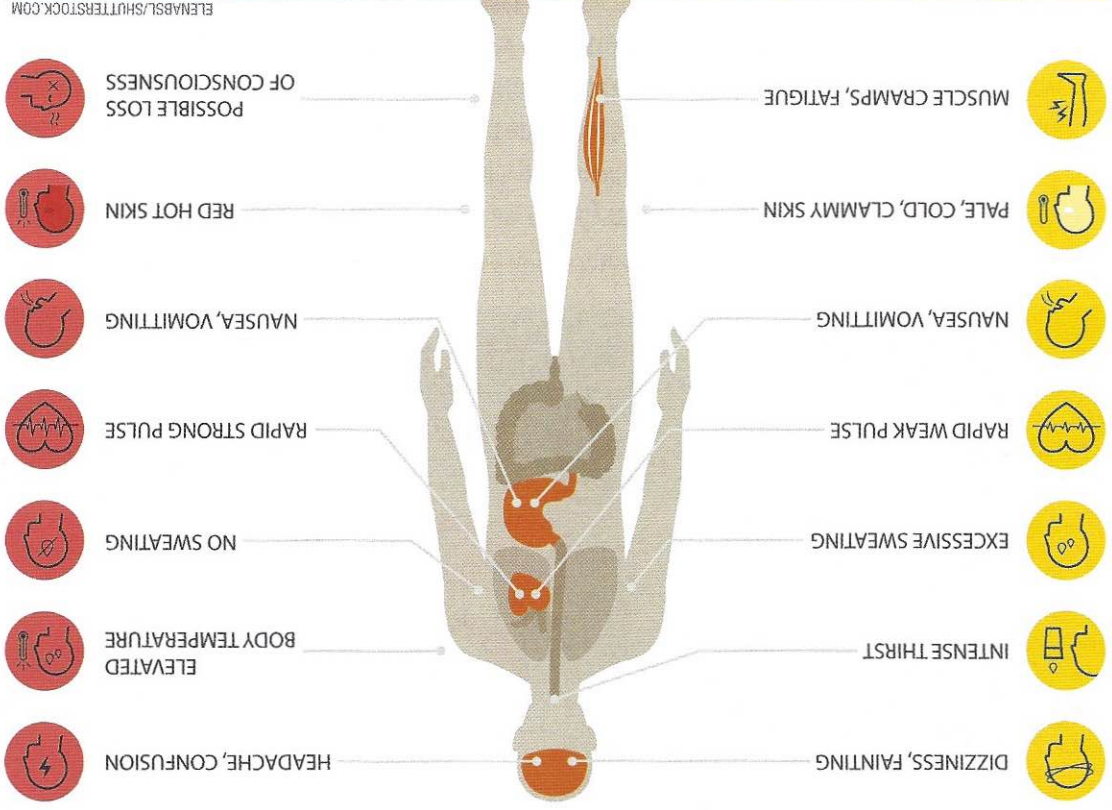
Try to avoid strenuous activities between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m.

when the sun (or heat) is at its highest,⁴ Heat illnesses can be dangerous, but you can be aware and prepared for them so that you can enjoy your favourite activities as the weather settles in this summer. ■

References

1. NASA Earth Observatory, 2019. Was the second warmest year on record, 2020. Accessed from: <https://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/images/146154/2019-was-the-second-warmest-year-on-record>. Accessed on August 24, 2020.
2. Health Canada. Extreme heat: heat waves. Accessed at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/sun-safety/extreme-heat-heat-waves.html>. Accessed on August 13, 2020.
3. Health Canada: Infographic: Staying Healthy in the Heat, 2019. Accessed at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/publications/healthy-living/infographic-staying-healthy-heat.html>. Accessed on August 14, 2020.
4. Government of Canada. Sun and heat safety tips for travelers, 2017. Accessed at: <https://travel.gc.ca/travelling/health-safety/sun-tips>. Accessed on August 20, 2020.

HEAT EXHAUSTION	Move to a cool place Drink water
HEAT STROKE	A medical emergency – call 911, then move to a cool place, apply cold water to the skin, and fan the person



Heat exhaustion vs. heat stroke

Symptoms to differentiate between these two serious heat illnesses can be challenging, but are very important to understand:

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