

# emergency **REDiPlan**



## **Coping with hot weather**

**Extreme heat can affect our daily activities, as well as being a serious risk to health and wellbeing.**

Think about what you would do if extreme heat:

- affected your health or the health of someone you know
- caused loss of electricity
- disrupted public transport
- closed schools or workplaces.

Everyone can be affected by heat in different ways, but there are some people in the community more susceptible to prolonged extreme heat. There are a number of simple things that you can do to prevent the hot weather becoming a serious problem for you or family members, friends or neighbours.

### **Tips for coping with the heat**

#### **Keep out of the heat**

- Plan your day in a way that allows you to stay out of the heat.
- Ahead of hotter weather, buy a few extra items to make sure you have enough food at home to last over the hot period.
- Think about paying bills online or over the phone.
- Stay indoors or in the shade during the hottest part of the day.
- If you cannot avoid strenuous activity like sport, home improvements or gardening, keep it for the cooler parts of the day such as early morning.
- If you must go out, stay in the shade. Wear a hat and light-coloured, loose-fitting clothes, preferably made of natural fibres. Wear sunglasses and apply sunscreen with a sun protection factor of 30 to exposed skin. If you will be outside for some time, take plenty of water with you.
- Ensure your pets or companion animals are also well hydrated and have plenty of shade when they are outside.

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## **Stay cool**

- Look at the things you can do to make your home cooler. Install or upgrade insulation in your roof, and install awnings, shade cloth or external blinds on the sides of the house facing the sun. For more advice, talk to a registered building practitioner or visit [www.yourhome.gov.au](http://www.yourhome.gov.au).
- If you can, stay inside, in the coolest rooms in the house.
- Reduce heat from sunlight coming through the windows by using external shades or light-coloured curtains.
- Use an air conditioner, evaporative cooler or fan to keep cool.
- Have your air conditioner serviced before summer.
- Remember, sometimes the electricity fails during heatwaves, so you'll need an alternative way to cool your home.
- Ensure there is sufficient air circulation, either from an air conditioner or by leaving a secured window or door open.
- Take cool showers and splash yourself several times a day with cold water, particularly your face and the back of your neck. A loose, cotton, damp cloth or scarf on the back of the neck can also help you to stay cool.
- Go to an air-conditioned building in your local area to cool off – a shopping mall, community centre, library or swimming pool.

## **Drink regularly**

- Drink regularly, even if you do not feel thirsty. Water is the best option.
- Avoid alcohol, tea, coffee and sugary or fizzy drinks. They make dehydration worse.
- Eat little and often rather than large meals. Try to eat more cold food, particularly salads and fruit, which contain water.

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## Get help

### Watching for heat stress Source: Australian Red Cross (2006) First Aid Handbook

There are two types of heat stress or hyperthermia – heat exhaustion and the more serious heat stroke.

	Signs and symptoms	What to do
Heat exhaustion happens when someone becomes dehydrated due to loss of water from exercising or working in poorly ventilated conditions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Muscle cramps, especially in the calves and toes</li> <li>• Exhaustion and general weakness</li> <li>• Nausea and/or vomiting</li> <li>• Dizzy spells</li> <li>• Pale, cool, clammy skin at first, becoming flushed and red later</li> <li>• A rapid, weak pulse and rapid, noisy breathing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help the person to lie down at total rest in a cool area</li> <li>• Loosen any tight clothing</li> <li>• If fully alert and conscious, give them frequent small drinks of water or ice chips to suck</li> <li>• If muscle cramps occur, gently stretch the affected muscles to ease pain</li> <li>• Check vital signs at regular intervals</li> <li>• If unconscious or not fully conscious, place in the recovery position</li> <li>• If the person is unable to drink, or is vomiting or unconscious, call 000 for an ambulance (or 112 from a mobile)</li> <li>• Prepare to give CPR if necessary</li> </ul>
Heat stroke is more serious and means the body is no longer able to regulate its temperature by cooling the skin's surface by sweating. The internal body temperature rises, and organ damage can occur.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No longer sweating</li> <li>• Red, hot and dry skin</li> <li>• A body temperature over 40°C</li> <li>• A rapid, strong pulse</li> <li>• Rapid, noisy breathing</li> <li>• Irrational or aggressive behaviour</li> <li>• Deterioration of the conscious state</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call 000 for an ambulance (or 112 from a mobile)</li> <li>• Cool the person using wet towels or a wet sheet with a fan directed across the surface</li> <li>• If ice packs are available, wrap them in towels and place them in the armpits or groin</li> <li>• If shivering occurs stop active cooling</li> <li>• Check vital signs at regular intervals</li> <li>• If unconscious or not fully conscious, place in the recovery position</li> <li>• Prepare to give CPR if necessary</li> </ul>

A Red Cross first aid course will help you cope with these situations and other health emergencies until help arrives.

For more information call 1300 367 428, email [firstaid@redcross.org.au](mailto:firstaid@redcross.org.au) or visit [www.redcross.org.au/firstaid](http://www.redcross.org.au/firstaid).



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## **Help others**

People who know each other in their community are more likely to turn to each other for help, and in the long term cope better with crises and emergencies. The best part is that taking time to get to know your neighbours has a range of other benefits too.

Some people are more susceptible to heat stress than others including:

- frail, older adults, because of their health and mobility status
- babies and young children, because of their inability to easily regulate their body temperature
- people with serious mental illness, because of their coping capacity
- people with chronic medical conditions (e.g. heart or breathing problems), because of their physical condition or the medications that they use
- people who misuse drugs or alcohol, because of their coping capacity
- people who are homeless, because of the exposure to heat, and their coping capacity
- manual workers, outdoor workers or sportspeople, because of the exposure to heat.

In addition, people you could assist include:

- older adults living at home by themselves
- single parents with young children
- large families
- people recently arrived to the area, or even the country.

Drop by their house one evening this week and introduce yourself. Share some of the hints above so they can keep safe and healthy too. During hot weather, check if they require additional assistance. You might be able to help with drawing blinds or awnings, or doing some shopping.

## **For more information**

Follow the Prepare, Respond, Recover links on the front page of our website [www.redcross.org.au](http://www.redcross.org.au) for more information on preparing yourself and your household for emergencies, email [rediplan@redcross.org.au](mailto:rediplan@redcross.org.au) or call the Red Cross office in your state.

For health-related information, visit [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au) or talk to your family doctor about your specific medical conditions.