EXTREME HEAT

FAMILY EMERGENCY PLAN

Stay cool. Hydrate early. Treat heat illness fast.

PURPOSE

This plan is written for families facing dangerous heat, high overnight temperatures, humidity, outdoor exposure, vehicle heat, or power loss during hot weather. It establishes household cooling, hydration, check-in, transportation, and medical-response actions before heat illness develops.

THE FAMILY PRIORITY ORDER

1. **PREVENT HEAT ILLNESS**
2. **MAINTAIN SAFE INDOOR TEMPERATURE**
3. **HYDRATION AND MEDICATIONS**
4. **PROTECT CHILDREN, OLDER ADULTS AND PETS**
5. **ESCALATE EARLY FOR MEDICAL SYMPTOMS**

ReadyParent Preparedness Series | Extreme Heat Edition

Source-informed by FEMA / Ready.gov, CDC Heat Health, National Weather Service, EPA, and local public-health heat guidance.

OPERATING PRINCIPLE

Extreme heat is a medical emergency risk before it is a comfort problem.

A family should not wait for someone to “feel too hot” before acting. Heat risk builds through temperature, humidity, direct sun, exertion, poor overnight cooling, medications, chronic illness, age, pregnancy, and loss of air conditioning. The plan should move vulnerable household members to reliable cooling early.

What extreme heat can do to a household

Heat can cause dehydration, heat cramps, heat exhaustion, heat stroke, worsening heart or lung disease, kidney injury, and medication-related complications. Children, older adults, pregnant people, outdoor workers, athletes, people with chronic conditions, and people without effective air conditioning can face greater risk.

Before the hazard develops

The family should complete the following actions before conditions deteriorate or an incident begins.

PART ONE

HOW TO PREPARE

Build a reliable cooling plan

- Identify the coolest rooms in the home and verify that air conditioning works before the hottest season. Service equipment and replace filters as recommended.
- Identify at least two alternate air-conditioned locations such as family homes, libraries, community centers, malls, or designated cooling centers. Know transportation options.
- Use weather stripping, shade, blinds, curtains, insulation, and other appropriate measures to reduce heat gain. Do not block required ventilation for combustion appliances.
- Keep drinking water available at home and in vehicles. Build a habit of drinking before thirst becomes intense during heat exposure.
- Review medications with a clinician or pharmacist if heat, dehydration, or refrigeration could affect them. Never change prescribed medication solely because of heat without medical guidance.

Set family heat triggers

- When an excessive heat watch/warning or high HeatRisk is forecast, move strenuous outdoor activity to cooler hours or cancel it.
- If home cooling fails and indoor temperature continues to rise, relocate high-risk family members before symptoms begin.
- Create scheduled check-ins for older relatives, neighbors, outdoor workers, and anyone living alone.
- Never leave a child, dependent adult, or pet in a parked vehicle, even briefly.

FAMILY HEAT RULE

Cooling is the intervention. If the home cannot stay safely cool, the family relocates to effective air conditioning. Fans may improve comfort in some conditions, but they are not a substitute for cooling during dangerous indoor heat.

PART TWO

STAY SAFE DURING

During extreme heat, reduce heat gain, reduce exertion, increase access to cooling, and watch for early symptoms. The family should make decisions based on the most vulnerable member, not the healthiest member.

Control exposure

- Spend as much time as practical in air-conditioned spaces. Close blinds or curtains receiving direct sun and minimize heat-producing activities during the hottest hours.
- Schedule essential outdoor activity for the coolest part of the day. Use shade, frequent rest breaks, lightweight clothing, and sunscreen as appropriate.
- Drink water regularly. People with fluid restrictions or medical conditions affecting hydration should follow their clinician's instructions.

Recognize heat exhaustion

- Possible signs include heavy sweating, weakness, dizziness, headache, nausea, irritability, thirst, and cool or clammy skin.
- Move the person to a cool place, loosen clothing, use cool wet cloths or a cool bath/shower when safe, and provide sips of water if the person is awake and able to drink. Seek medical advice for concerning or persistent symptoms.

Treat suspected heat stroke as an emergency

- Confusion, loss of consciousness, seizures, severe altered behavior, or very high body temperature can indicate heat stroke.
- Call 911 immediately. Move the person to a cooler area and begin rapid cooling with cool water, wet cloths, ice packs to major heat-transfer areas, or other available cooling while waiting for EMS. Do not give fluids to an unconscious or severely confused person.

POWER-OUTAGE TRIGGER

During extreme heat, a prolonged air-conditioning outage can become a life-safety issue quickly. If indoor conditions are becoming unsafe, relocate rather than trying to "tough it out," especially with infants, older adults, pregnant people, or medically vulnerable family members.

PART THREE

AFTER THE DISASTER

Heat risk does not end when the sun sets. Hot homes can remain dangerous overnight, and heat illness can worsen after prolonged exposure. Recovery means restoring hydration, cooling, sleep, and medical stability.

Continue monitoring vulnerable family members

- Watch for persistent dizziness, weakness, nausea, confusion, fainting, reduced urination, chest symptoms, or breathing difficulty. Seek medical evaluation when symptoms are concerning.
- Replace fluids gradually and continue cooling. Avoid immediate heavy exertion after significant heat exposure.

Reset the home for the next heat event

Restock water and oral rehydration supplies used according to household medical needs, service cooling equipment if it failed, confirm backup locations and transportation, and document what indoor temperatures or outage duration triggered relocation.

Protect food and medication after outages

Follow food-safety guidance for refrigerated and frozen food after power loss. Verify medication storage requirements with a pharmacist or manufacturer when refrigeration or temperature limits were exceeded.

AFTER-ACTION QUESTION

What caused delay, confusion, separation, loss of information, unnecessary exposure, or a preventable failure of supplies? Correct that weakness while the event is still fresh in the family's memory.

FAMILY EXTREME HEAT READINESS STANDARD

The plan is ready when the family can answer these questions without guessing.

- ✓ Where will we go if our air conditioning fails?
- ✓ Who in our family is at higher risk from heat because of age, pregnancy, work, medications, or medical conditions?
- ✓ What temperature or loss-of-cooling condition triggers relocation?
- ✓ Who checks on relatives or neighbors living alone?
- ✓ Do we know heat exhaustion and heat stroke warning signs?
- ✓ Is drinking water available in every regularly used vehicle?
- ✓ Which medications require special heat or refrigeration precautions?

PRACTICE STANDARD

Before the hottest season, test the family cooling plan: verify AC, identify two backup cooled locations, confirm transportation, place water in vehicles, and have every adult explain heat-stroke symptoms and the 911/cooling response.

REFERENCE BASIS

AUTHORITATIVE SOURCES USED FOR THIS PLAN

This ReadyParent plan consolidates widely accepted U.S. preparedness, response, safety, and recovery guidance specific to extreme heat. Local instructions and incident-specific guidance take priority.

Ready.gov — Extreme Heat — https://www.ready.gov/heat
Household heat preparedness, cooling, hydration, and heat-illness actions.

CDC — Heat Health — https://www.cdc.gov/heat-health/
Current health guidance, HeatRisk information, risk factors, and prevention.

CDC — Protect Yourself From Extreme Heat — https://www.cdc.gov/climate-health/php/resources/protect-yourself-from-the-dangers-of-extreme-heat.html
Cooling, hydration, clothing, activity, and check-in recommendations.

National Weather Service — Heat Safety — https://www.weather.gov/safety/heat
Heat alerts, heat index/HeatRisk education, and weather safety.

Ready.gov — Power Outages — https://www.ready.gov/power-outages
Planning for loss of electricity and cooling during emergencies.

Publication note

Guidance reviewed August 2026. This document is educational preparedness guidance and does not replace instructions from local emergency management, law enforcement, fire/EMS, public-health authorities, utilities, building officials, event security, or other agencies with jurisdiction. Conditions vary by location and incident; when official instructions conflict with this plan, follow the official instructions.