

Supporting Persons with Schizophrenia During Extreme Heat Events



A guide for persons
with schizophrenia and
support persons



Supporting Persons with Schizophrenia During Extreme Heat Events

A guide for individuals with schizophrenia and support persons

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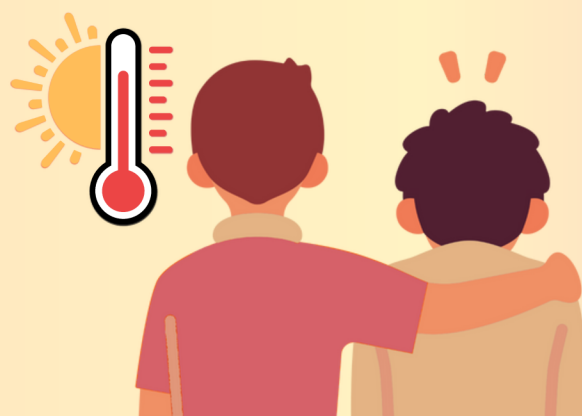
Extreme Heat Events

Although everyone's health is at risk during hot weather and extreme heat events, **persons with schizophrenia are at an even greater risk.**

People with well-managed schizophrenia can use the **Self-Check resource on Page 5** for more detailed guidance about preparing for and responding to an extreme heat event.

However, some people, especially those who live alone, may have difficulties caring for themselves and need additional support. If you are a caregiver, family member, or friend of someone with schizophrenia that needs support, consider using the **Wellness Check tool on Page 6** to help you support persons with schizophrenia before and during an extreme heat event.

These resources can be used alongside the **Personal Heat Preparedness Plan** to help individuals with schizophrenia stay safe during extreme heat.





Signs and Symptoms of Heat Illness

Persons with schizophrenia often have a reduced ability to respond to and sense heat. As a result, someone may not recognize when they are at risk of a heat-related illness and may not respond appropriately (e.g., seek a cool space, hydrate).

Extreme heat can worsen schizophrenia symptoms, including:

- Paranoia
- Psychotic episodes
- Visual/auditory hallucinations
- Cognitive disturbances
- Difficulty managing symptoms
- Anxiety
- Irritability or hostility
- Disrupted sleep patterns
- Compromised mental stability
- Reduced physical capacity

Classic signs and symptoms of heat stress include:

- Feeling unwell
- Headache
- Weakness
- Dizziness
- Irritability
- Skin feels very hot
- Fatigue/tiredness
- Thirst
- Sweating
- General weakness

Encourage mood and symptoms tracking during extreme heat

A person with schizophrenia may not always show the typical signs and symptoms of heat-related illness, or may not use everyday language to express how they are feeling. Check for any general changes in behaviour or in regular daily routines and activities when performing a wellness check. Logging signs and symptoms in the **Personal Heat Preparedness Plan: Mood and Symptoms Tracker** can help medical professionals or support persons better understand someone's health status in an emergency.

Take action if you suspect a medical emergency!

Heat-related emergencies are health crises caused by prolonged exposure to heat. If you or someone you know is showing signs of disorientation, light-headedness, episodes of fainting, extreme fatigue, and/or vomiting, take immediate action and follow these steps:

- Call 911 or your region's emergency healthcare provider.
- Have the individual lie down in a safe and comfortable position in a cool location if possible.
- Remove extra clothing.
- Apply cool, wet towels or ice packs around the body, especially on the neck, armpits and groin.
- Stay with the individual while you wait for medical attention.

Using These Resources

1 Learn about heat-health risks for persons with schizophrenia

- You can read about why you or someone you know could be at higher risk of a heat-related illness under **Factors Affecting Heat-Susceptibility in Persons with Schizophrenia** (Page 3) and use the checklist under **General Factors Affecting Heat-Susceptibility** (Page 4) to determine any additional factors that could further increase heat-health risks.
- You can find links to more information about things like preparing your home for the heat and mental health support under **Additional Resources** (Page 7).

2 Learn about how to conduct a Self-Check or a Wellness Check

- Persons with well-managed schizophrenia may wish to use the **Self-Check Guidance for Persons with Schizophrenia** resource (Page 5) for more detailed guidance about preparing for and responding to an extreme heat event.
- If you are a friend, family member, or support person of someone with schizophrenia who may need additional assistance, or you are interested in supporting someone you know with schizophrenia during an extreme heat event, the **Conducting In-Person or Remote Wellness Checks** (Page 6) provides detailed guidance for helping someone prepare and respond to extreme heat.

3 Learn about keeping safe or offering support after an extreme heat event has ended

- After an extreme heat event has ended, indoor temperatures can remain dangerously high and the effects of heat on the body can last for multiple days. You can learn about ways to help yourself or someone you know stay safe under **Continue Monitoring After an Extreme Heat Event** (Page 7).

4 Using the Personal Heat Preparedness Plan to prepare for and respond to an extreme heat event

- The Personal Heat Preparedness Plan provides a toolkit to help persons with schizophrenia stay safe during extreme heat events. People with well-managed schizophrenia can use this resource to as a quick resource for tips to stay cool, to gather their important information incase of emergency, and to help track their mood and any heat-related symptoms.
- However, some people, especially those who live alone, may need additional support to complete their Heat Preparedness Plan. If you are a caregiver, family member, or friend of someone with schizophrenia that needs support, consider assisting with completing the Personal Heat Preparedness Plan.

Factors Affecting Heat-Susceptibility in Persons with Schizophrenia

Persons with schizophrenia may have reduced capacity to lose heat, putting them at a greater risk of experiencing a heat-related illness. To protect yourself or others with schizophrenia, review the information below and follow the steps on Pages 5 and 6.

Awareness



- Some individuals with schizophrenia may (un)intentionally avoid mass-media messaging as it can trigger or exacerbate paranoia, anxiety, or distress.
- Some individuals with schizophrenia may have difficulties communicating medical symptoms due to a combination of cognitive deficits, disorganized thinking, and a decreased self-awareness of changes to their physical health.
- Extreme heat can worsen mental health or even trigger psychotic episodes, making it more difficult to manage symptoms or accurately assess one's own health status.

Medication and Substance Use



- Medications such as anti-adrenergic, beta-blockers, diuretics, NSAIDs, anticholinergics, antidepressants, and antipsychotics can affect the body's ability to lose heat and cause dehydration. This includes certain medications for common conditions like diabetes or heart disease, painkillers, or mood or anxiety medications.
- Suddenly stopping anti-psychotic medications can lead to fever, heat illness, or recurrence of psychosis symptoms.
- Some individuals with schizophrenia may discontinue medication use in stressful situations or when not feeling like themselves, such as during extreme heat.
- Persons with schizophrenia are more susceptible to substance use disorders. The ability to sense and respond to heat may be altered when using alcohol or drugs.

Heat-Mitigating Behaviours



- Persons with schizophrenia may not be able to accurately assess the risks of hot weather or may experience delusions that alter perceptions of one's environment.
- Not drinking enough can cause someone to become dehydrated. Persons with schizophrenia may also suffer from compulsive over-drinking behaviours, which could be dangerous in itself, as well as a sign of worsening symptoms.
- Persons with schizophrenia may choose to dress in layers, possibly due to an impaired ability to sense their thermal state or for a sense of security.

Living Space



- Extreme heat events can lead to dangerous levels of indoor overheating. Individuals with schizophrenia may be less sensitive to or aware of changes in indoor temperatures, which increases risks of experiencing a heat-related illness or injury.
- Persons with schizophrenia may be less likely to take protective measures to cool the home like activating the air-conditioning, covering the windows (e.g., lowering the blinds), or moving to a cooler space.
- Due to various structural and social factors, persons with schizophrenia are less likely to have access to adequate or heat-resilient housing.
- Persons with schizophrenia often experience sleep disruptions. Indoor overheating can worsen this response and may increase risks of experiencing psychosis-related events.

Seeking Support



- Persons with schizophrenia are more likely to be socially isolated and face barriers to accessing social support or necessary healthcare.
- Some individuals with schizophrenia may avoid asking for help or seeking medical care or other public resources like cooling centres due to previous experiences of discrimination.

General Factors Affecting Heat-Susceptibility

In addition to the factors identified on Page 3, other personal factors listed below can increase the risk of heat-related injuries in persons with schizophrenia. The more boxes checked, the higher the potential risk.

Demographics 	☐ Older Adult (60 years+)	The body's natural cooling processes are impaired with age.
Health Status 	☐ Presence of Chronic Disease ☐ Previous Heat Injury ☐ Current or Acute Illness ☐ Poor Physical Fitness ☐ Impaired or Reduced Mobility	Individuals with additional chronic diseases may have an impaired ability to cool, leading to dangerous increases in body temperature. People who have previously experienced a heat illness or injury may be less heat tolerant. People who are temporarily unwell may experience higher core temperatures due to a reduced ability to lose heat. People who are sedentary or do not engage in regular physical activity have a reduced ability to lose heat. People with reduced mobility might be less able to take protective measures like seek cooled spaces or accessing water to maintain hydration.
Lifestyle & Living Situation 	☐ Lack of Acclimatization ☐ Living Alone or Socially Isolated ☐ Housing Security and Quality ☐ Indoor Temperatures	People who are not regularly exposed to heat have a reduced capacity to lose heat. People who live alone or do not have strong social connections or support are more at-risk. Building characteristics and location in a city can affect the level of indoor overheating experienced during an extreme heat event. Most heat-related fatalities occur in the home. If you are able to cool your home, maintain indoor temperatures at 26°C. This will limit your risk of a heat-related illness. Heat-health risks increase as indoor temperatures exceed 31°C.

Self-Check Guidance for Persons with Schizophrenia

Consider using the steps below with your Personal Heat Preparedness Plan to help you prepare for and respond to an extreme heat event.

Prepare



Respond

Awareness



- ☐ A heat warning will typically be issued 24-48 hours before an extreme heat event. Check current heat alerts via the Public Weather Alerts website or the WeatherCAN app.
- ☐ Plan your schedule for the upcoming days to avoid going outdoors when possible. Try to reschedule outdoor activities until after the heat event has passed.

Monitor heat alerts throughout the extreme heat event. Extreme weather can change quickly or last longer than expected.

Limit physical activity both indoors (e.g., completing house chores) and especially outdoors. If you need to go outdoors, try to do so during the coolest parts of the day.

Medication and Substance Use



- ☐ If you are taking anti-psychotic or other medications, make sure your prescription is up to date. Some medications may increase risks of heat-related illness, so consult a healthcare provider for guidance if needed.
- ☐ Write down any medication(s) or health condition(s) in your Personal Heat Preparedness Plan.
- ☐ Be aware that hot weather can cause mental and physical stress. Some people may use alcohol or non-prescription drugs as a coping strategy. Prepare alternative strategies you can use over the next few days.

Continue taking your medication as prescribed, unless a healthcare provider has informed you otherwise. Suddenly stopping medications like anti-psychotics could trigger a heat-related illness.

Keep your Personal Heat Preparedness Plan with you so that a medical professional or support person can access your medical information quickly if needed.

Avoid using alcohol and non-prescription substances before and during an extreme heat event. Try to practice alternative coping strategies for managing the mental or physical stress of extreme heat.

Heat-Mitigating Behaviours



- ☐ Make sure you have access to clean drinking water for the heat event. Stock up if necessary.
- ☐ Prepare a meal plan for the next few days with meals that do not require the oven or stove. Purchase groceries in advance.
- ☐ Prepare light-weight, light-coloured, loose-fitting summer clothing to wear during the extreme heat event.

It is important to drink water regularly to stay hydrated during hot weather, though feeling a need to drink excessively could be a sign of heat-related illness.

Avoid using large kitchen appliances and electronics that can generate additional heat in the home.

Wear your summer clothing during the day and to sleep, and wear a wide-brimmed hat if going outdoors. Avoid wearing layers of clothing.

Living Space



- ☐ Make sure your air-conditioner is working if you have one and that windows and blinds are functional.
- ☐ If possible, create a temporary living and sleeping space in a cooler area, such as the lowest level of the house (e.g., basement) or in a room that does not get direct sunlight.

Turn on your air-conditioner if you have one. Open windows in early morning or late evening to generate air flow through the home, but use window shading like blinds to block the sun.

Monitor the temperature in your living and sleeping space with a thermostat or thermometer and only activate a fan if the room temperature is below 33°C. Take cool showers before bed to stay cool.

Seeking Support



- ☐ Write down contact information for people you can ask for support or call in an emergency in your Personal Heat Preparedness Plan.
- ☐ Identify locations you can go to and transport options if your home gets too hot.

When possible, keep in contact with family, friends, or a caregiver. Use your Personal Heat Preparedness Plan to track your mood and any symptoms, and review it with someone that can support you so they can be in a better position to understand your needs.

Go to a cooler location if your home gets too hot and seek medical attention if you are experiencing signs and symptoms of a heat-related illness.

Conducting In-Person or Remote Wellness Checks

Use the steps below to help complete a Personal Heat Preparedness Plan and conduct remote and in-person wellness checks before and during an extreme heat event.

	Ask	Prepare	Respond
Awareness	☐ Are you aware of the current heat warning and how long it is expected to last? ☐ Can you describe how your body feels when you are hot? Do you feel unwell or have any symptoms like disorientation or anxiety?	Encourage them to check current heat alerts via the Public Weather Alerts website or the WeatherCAN app. Becoming familiar with how they respond to and describe the heat stress and schizophrenia symptoms in their Personal Heat Preparedness Plan will help you both prepare for the extreme heat event.	Keep monitoring heat alerts. Extreme weather can change quickly or last longer than expected. Encourage them to track their mood and any symptoms using their Personal Heat Preparedness Plan. Watch for early signs of heat illness, as these can quickly evolve into life-threatening emergencies.
Medication and Substance Use	☐ Are you taking your medications as prescribed? ☐ Are you currently using any non-prescribed substances or drinking alcohol?	If they are taking anti-psychotic or other medications, make sure their prescription is up to date. Help them write down any medication(s) or health condition(s) in their Personal Heat Preparedness Plan so that a medical professional or support person can access it quickly if needed. Some people may use alcohol or non-prescription drugs as a coping strategy for mental and physical stress during extreme heat. Discuss alternative strategies they can use over the next few days.	Encourage them to keep taking medication as prescribed, unless a healthcare provider has informed them otherwise. Suddenly stopping medications like anti-psychotics could trigger a heat-related illness. Consult a healthcare provider for guidance if needed. Encourage them to avoid using alcohol and non-prescription substances before and during an extreme heat event and support alternative coping strategies.
Heat-Mitigating Behaviours	☐ Do you have anything planned for the next few days that will require you to go outside? ☐ Are you dressed for the weather? ☐ Do you have accessible drinking water? ☐ Do you have a meal plan for the next few days? Have you gotten groceries?	Help plan a schedule for the upcoming days to avoid going outdoors when possible. Reschedule outdoor activities until after the heat event has passed. Help select light-weight, light-coloured, loose-fitting summer clothing to wear during the extreme heat event. Make sure they have access to clean drinking water for the heat event. Help them stock up if necessary. Help to prepare a meal plan for the coming days that does not require an oven or stove and purchase groceries in advance.	Limit physical activity both indoors (e.g., completing house chores) and especially outdoors. If they need to go outdoors, plan to do so in the cooler parts of the day. Encourage them to limit the amount of clothing worn. If going outdoors, encourage them to wear sunblock and a hat. Encourage them to stay hydrated, but be aware that drinking excessively could be a sign of heat-related illness. Remind them to avoid using large kitchen appliances and electronics that can generate additional heat in the home.
Living Space	☐ Do you have access to air-conditioning? ☐ Is there a cooler location in your home that you can spend time in during the heat event?	Make sure their air-conditioner is working if they have one and that windows and blinds are functional. If possible, help create a temporary living and sleeping space in a cooler area, such as the lowest level of the house (e.g., basement) or in a room that does not get direct sunlight.	Help to monitor the temperature in their living space to ensure indoor temperatures remain within a safe upper limit of 26°C. Encourage cooling strategies like turning on air-conditioning, opening windows to generate air flow, using window shading, and cool showers before bed. Only activate a fan if the room temperature is below 33°C.
Seeking Support	☐ Are you willing and prepared to seek medical care if needed?	Identify emergency contacts, cooler locations, and transport options for if their home gets too hot. Help write them in their Personal Heat Preparedness Plan. This can help medical professionals understand their needs and condition in an emergency.	Isolating oneself during a heat wave can be dangerous. Encourage them to remain in contact with you and/or seek support of others. Let them know you will regularly check in on them and ask that they contact you.

Continue Monitoring After an Extreme Heat Event

After an extreme heat event has ended, indoor temperatures can remain dangerously high and the effects of heat on the body can last for multiple days. Here are tips to help individuals, caregivers, family members and friends remain vigilant after an extreme heat event has ended:

- Monitor indoor temperature to make sure it stays **at or below 26°C**.
- If above this limit and air-conditioning is not available, continue to implement cooling strategies such as:
 - accessing **cooler space** in the home,
 - periodic visits to **cooler buildings** (public library, mall, others),
 - **covering your windows** during the day to reduce solar heating
 - **using a pedestal or ceiling fan** (if room temperature is at or below 33°C).
- **Avoid** strenuous physical activity.
- Maintain a healthy diet and **remain hydrated** by drinking water regularly.
- **Avoid** alcohol and use of non-prescription drugs.
- Try to get sufficient **sleep**.
- **Maintain regular contact** with family and friends.
- Continue logging your **general mood, well-being and symptoms** of heat stress. If you experience onset or worsening of schizophrenia or heat-related symptoms, take action and **seek medical attention**.

Tips for Support Persons

Keep in regular contact to monitor for any changes in their condition.

Ask them what their thermostat or thermometer reads to ensure temperatures in their home are returning to normal.

Review any symptoms they may have listed in the Mood and Symptom tracker to ensure they have subsided.

Experiencing an extreme heat event can be both physically and mentally stressful, so remind them there may be lasting mental health effects of extreme heat. Advise they should seek medical attention if they feel unwell.

Additional Resources

Follow these links for more information:

- [Pre-Summer Heat Risk Assessment: A Guide for Preparing Your Home \(HEPRU\)](#)
- [Health Checks During Extreme Heat Events: A Guide for Doing In-Person and Remote Health Check \(HEPRU/BC CDC/NCCEH\)](#)
- [Extreme Heat – Get Prepared \(Government of Canada\)](#)
- [Extreme heat events: How to protect yourself from the health effects of extreme heat \(Health Canada\)](#)
- [PreparedBC: Extreme Heat Preparedness Guide](#)
- [The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health: Crisis Resources](#)
- [WeatherCAN app](#)

Personal Heat Preparedness Plan

A toolkit to help persons with schizophrenia stay safe during extreme heat events



Heat can affect your health

If you feel **anxious**, **unsteady on your feet**, or **your body feels very hot**:

- Try to find a cooler space right away
- Contact a friend, family member, or support person
- Call 911 in an emergency

Staying Safe in the Heat

Check the boxes below as you “**Prepare for the Heat**”, and review the **Heatwave “DO”s and “DON’T”s**. If you are unable to take any of the actions below on your own, **ask for help** from a friend, family member, or support person.

Prepare for the Heat

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐  Check for Heat Alerts | ☐  Check Windows and Air-Conditioning are Working |
| ☐  Fill Out Your Personal Heat Preparedness Plan | ☐  Get Groceries in Advance |
| ☐  Set Up a Cool Living and Sleeping Area | ☐  Fill Medication Prescriptions |
| ☐  Plan Your Schedule to Avoid Going Outside | ☐  Stock Up On Clean Drinking Water |

Heatwave “DO”s

-  ☒ Contact Friends and Family Regularly
-  ☒ Write Down Your Mood and Symptoms
-  ☒ Block Out the Sun with Window Blinds
-  ☒ Monitor the Temperature in Your Home
-  ☒ Stay Hydrated
-  ☒ Get to a Cooler Location if Needed
-  ☒ Keep Taking Any Medication as Prescribed

Heatwave “DON’T”s

-  ☒ Going Outside in the Daytime
-  ☒ Using the Oven or Stove to Cook
-  ☒ Using Alcohol and Non-Prescription Drugs
-  ☒ Wearing Layers or Tight, Heavy Clothing
-  ☒ Using a Fan in Temperatures Above 33°C
-  ☒ Unnecessary Physical Activity or Non-Urgent Chores
-  ☒ Ignoring Signs of Heat Illness

Personal Heat Preparedness Plan:

Personal and emergency information

Keep this information with you in case of an emergency. You, a medical professional, or a support person may need to access it quickly.

Name: _____

Medications: _____

Health Conditions: _____

Allergies: _____

Who can I call for help and support?

1 Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

2 Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

Where can I go if it is too hot at home?

1 Place: _____ Address: _____

2 Place: _____ Address: _____

Local crisis hotline: _____

Personal Heat Preparedness Plan: Mood and Symptoms Tracker

How am I feeling? Check boxes or write down any notes about your symptoms below.

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4
Mood tracking	☐ 😊 ☐ 😐 ☐ 😞 ☐ 😡	☐ 😊 ☐ 😐 ☐ 😞 ☐ 😡	☐ 😊 ☐ 😐 ☐ 😞 ☐ 😡	☐ 😊 ☐ 😐 ☐ 😞 ☐ 😡
Body and skin feels hot				
Feel out of sorts, detached from reality, or in a fog				
Anxiety/stress				
Heart pounding or racing				
Headache or dizziness				
Muscle weakness				
Body pains				
Other symptoms				