

Safety for infants and young children during extreme heat

Heat and humidity can go up in the summer months, making it feel hotter outside than normal. Extreme heat happens when the heat and humidity are much higher than we would expect during a normal summer day.

Extreme heat can be harmful to anyone's health, but infants (0-1 year) and young children (1-5 years) may be at a higher risk of heat-related illness.

What can you do to prevent heat-related illness?

Keep cool inside

- Turn on air conditioning (AC) if you have it. A temperature of 26°C is safe for most people
- Go to local cooling centres or community spaces, such as libraries or malls
- Close windows during the heat of the day to trap cooler air inside
- Cover windows by using shutters, blinds, drapes, blankets or sheets to keep sun out
- If the temperature drops at night and it is safe, open windows to let cool air in
- Turn off lights and electronic devices that are not in use to avoid any extra heat
- Use your oven or stove as little as possible
- Do not point a fan directly at your infant or child as this can dehydrate them. Fans may not help prevent heat-related illness if the temperatures are above 35°C
- Give your child a supervised, normal room temperature bath or sponge bath

Keep cool outside

During an extreme heat event, you can lower the risk of heat-related illness by keeping infants and young children in a cool space indoors during the hottest hours of the day. If they must be outside, you can reduce their risk of heat-related illness by:

- Dressing them in light-coloured, loose-fitting, lightweight clothing; a wide-brimmed hat with no ties; and UV protective sunglasses. Although light-coloured clothing is recommended to keep cool, keep in mind that it does not provide as much protection from the sun's rays as darker-coloured clothing
- For kids aged 6 months or older, applying sunscreen with UVA and UVB protection and a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of 30 or more to exposed skin. Sunscreen won't protect your infant or child from the heat, but a sunburn can make heat-related illnesses worse or more likely to occur
- Offering regularly scheduled breaks in the shade or in a cool area inside
- Using a more open-aired stroller that has mesh panelling or removing the back panel may help to circulate air around your child. Keeping your infant shaded in their stroller by using an umbrella will also help keep them cool

Keep Hydrated

0-6 months

- Offer more feedings than usual throughout the day. You do not need to give extra water or other drinks unless recommended by your health care provider

- Put a towel, sheet or diaper in between you and your infant during feeding times. A dampened washcloth in the crook of your arm may also be helpful
- Try breast/chest-feeding while laying down

If you are breast/chest-feeding you also need to stay well hydrated; try having a cool non-alcoholic, low sugar drink during every feed in addition to other beverages throughout the day.

6 months and older

- Offer extra feeds of breastmilk or formula to your child
- Offer small amounts of cool drinking water after, or between feedings

1 year and older

- Regularly offer water to your child as their main drink, even if they aren't thirsty
- Aim for your child to drink 1 to 1.5L (4-6 cups) of water daily

Car Safety

- Never leave your infant or child alone in the car, even if the windows are open. Temperatures can quickly become deadly, overheating infants and young children
- Use sunshades on windows to block the sun during car rides. Covering a car seat with a rug, towel, blanket, or baby wrap may restrict air circulation around your child and increase the risk of heat-related illness
- Dress babies in one layer, with no hats or foot coverings, like socks and shoes
- Provide extra feeds for your child during long trips in a car as car air conditioners may cause dehydration
- Stop and wake your baby for feeds if they become sleepy while travelling in the hot weather

Keeping cool during sleep

- Have infants and young children sleep in the coolest room in the house, even if this is not their bedroom
- Sleep in the same room as your infant for the first 6 months. This is safest for them, whether for naps during the day or at night
- Have your infant or young child wear only a diaper to bed. This may help them stay cool and feel more comfortable
- For infants, keep the sleep surface free of extra padding (like crib bumpers) or heavy blankets. A firm crib mattress is recommended for safer sleep and may also help to keep air circulating around your baby
- For children, sleeping on a firm mattress and using a firm pillow may help keep them cooler during sleep

Remove waterproof mattress covers as they often promote sweating. For extremely hot weather, consider other options for bedwetting such as nighttime pull-up diapers, using a towel on top of the mattress, or using a disposable absorbent mat.

It is important to continue to follow safe sleep practices during an extreme heat event to reduce the risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). For more information, see: [HealthLinkBC File #46 Sleep related infant death.](#)

BC's new heat alert warning system

The B.C. Heat Alert and Response System, or BC HARS, defines two categories of heat events – heat warning and the more dangerous extreme heat emergency – triggered by specific temperature ranges to initiate recommended response actions. Environment and Climate Change Canada issue the alerts and you can sign up to get heat push notifications to your smartphones through the [WeatherCAN app](#) for any/all of the pre-selected locations.

For more information

For more information on extreme heat, see:

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/public-safety-and-emergency-services/emergency-preparedness-response-recovery/embc/preparedbc/preparedbc-guides/preparedbc_extreme_heat_guide.pdf.

For more information on keeping children cool,

see: <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/hc-sc/documents/services/publications/healthy-living/keep-children-cool-extreme-heat/extreme-heat-brochure-keep-children-cool-en.pdf>.

For more information on sun safety, see:

- [HealthLinkBC File #26 Sun safety for children](#)
- [HealthLink File #35c Heat-related illness in infants and young children](#)
- [Toddler's first steps](#)

For more information on safer sleep for infants and children, see:

- [Baby's best chance: Sleep](#)
- [HealthLinkBC File #107 Safe sleeping for babies](#)
- [Safer infant sleep: Practice resource for health-care providers](#)
- [Toddler's first steps: Sleep and your toddler](#)

For more information about breast/chest-feeding, see:

- [Baby's best chance](#) (pg. 93)
- [HealthLinkBC File #70 Breastfeeding](#)

For more safety information on how to keep pregnant or early postpartum individuals safe from extreme heat, see: [HealthLink File #35a Safety for the perinatal population during extreme heat](#).

For recommendations on how to make fluids more fun, see:

<https://appetitetoplay.com/healthy-eating/tips-ideas/hydration-kids>.

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