

# Be Red Cross Ready

Prepare so you can protect.



## Be Prepared for Extreme Heat during COVID-19

### Understand your risks

#### What is extreme heat?

We all expect it to be warm in the summer, but sometimes the heat can be severe and even dangerous. In most of the U.S., extreme heat is a long period (2 to 3 days) of high heat and humidity with temperatures above 90 degrees. High humidity worsens the impacts of extreme heat. That's why forecasters use the [Heat Index](#), which combines humidity and temperature to describe how hot it actually feels. According to [U.S. government agencies](#), extreme heat events are becoming more common and severe as our climate changes.

#### Why is extreme heat dangerous?

Extreme heat stresses your body's ability to properly cool itself. While the body normally cools itself by sweating, this might not be enough during extreme heat, causing your body's temperature to rise faster than it can cool itself down. This can cause damage to your brain and other vital organs. Heat stroke is the most serious heat-related illness and can result in death without immediate medical attention.

#### Impacts of extreme heat and COVID-19

Extreme heat kills hundreds of people living in the U.S. every year and causes many more to become seriously ill. Extreme heat causes more deaths than any other weather-related hazard. While extreme heat is always uncomfortable, it tends to be worse and have a greater impact in urban areas that have minimal open green space because concrete and pavement concentrate heat and release heat more slowly than in rural areas. COVID-19 amplifies the health risks of extreme heat, presenting us with new challenges to protect our health.

#### People at greater risk

Anyone can develop heat-related illness. But, the people at greater risk for heat-related health impacts include older adults (65+ years); children, infants and pregnant women; people with existing medical conditions, such as heart disease, poor circulation, obesity, and individuals with or recovering from COVID-19; people taking certain medications, including for blood pressure, allergies, mental illness among others; outdoor workers; people who live alone; people who are experiencing homelessness; people with limited personal resources (e.g., income, mobility); people living in neighborhoods within a city that lack open green spaces; people who use alcohol, cocaine, or amphetamines and people who exert themselves in the heat.

## BEFORE: Take steps to help protect your health

Heat-related deaths and illnesses are preventable. You can take steps to help protect your health during extreme heat events, while also protecting yourself and others from COVID-19. Prepare now so that you have the critical knowledge, skills, and supplies.

### Learn how to stay hydrated

Drinking enough water is one of the most important things you can do to prevent heat-related illness. Your body needs water to control your body temperature, heart rate, and blood pressure, support your immune system, digest food, and eliminate waste. Keep in mind that an average person needs to drink about three quarters of a gallon of fluid daily. Individual needs vary depending on age, gender, health, level of activity, food choices and climate. An excellent “hydration check” is to note your urine color; dark yellow may indicate you are not drinking enough water.

- Stay away from sugary, caffeinated and alcoholic drinks, as these cause you to lose more body fluid.
- In general, eating meals and snacks throughout the day with adequate water intake is enough to maintain electrolytes and replace salt lost when you sweat.
  - Certain medical conditions, such as diabetes or heart disease, and taking certain medications may mean you need to drink more water. Be sure to talk to your healthcare provider about how to prepare for a heat wave.

### Learn how to recognize and respond to heat-related illness

- Learn how to [prevent heat-related illness](#), and what to do if you or others show [warning signs](#). Learn how to protect [children, older adults, and people at greater risk of heat-related illness](#).
- Never leave infants, children, older adults, individuals with disabilities, or pets in a vehicle unattended, even if the windows are open or the engine is running, and the air conditioning is on. [In 2019, 52 children died](#) of heatstroke because they were left or became trapped in a hot car. Share [prevention resources](#).
- Download the free American Red Cross [First Aid App](#).
- Exposing yourself to the sun or to extreme heat does not prevent or cure COVID-19, but it will increase your risk of heat-related illness.
- Learn how to help protect yourself and others from COVID-19 from trusted sources, including the [cdc.gov/coronavirus](#) and [redcross.org/coronavirus](#).
- Don't be afraid to seek emergency medical care immediately. Health facilities have procedures in place to help protect against the spread of COVID-19.

Heat-Related Illness	What to look for		What to do	
<b>Heat Cramps</b> are muscle spasms, often in the abdomen, arms, or calves, caused by a large loss of salt and water in the body.	Heavy sweating during intense exercise Muscle pain or spasms		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stop physical activity and move person to a cool place</li> <li>• Have person drink water or a sports drink</li> <li>• Instruct person to wait for cramps to go away before resuming physical activity</li> </ul>	Get medical help right away if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cramps last longer than 1 hour</li> <li>• Person has heart problems</li> </ul>
<b>Heat Exhaustion</b> is a severe heat-related illness requiring emergency medical treatment.	Heavy sweating Cold, pale and clammy skin Fast, weak pulse Nausea or vomiting Muscle cramps	Tiredness or weakness Dizziness Headache Brief fainting (passing out)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move the person to a cool place</li> <li>• Loosen their clothes</li> <li>• Put cool, wet cloths on their body, use misting and fanning, or help them take a cool bath</li> <li>• Have the person sip water</li> </ul>	Get medical help right away if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vomiting occurs</li> <li>• Symptoms get worse</li> <li>• Symptoms last longer than 1 hour</li> <li>• Confusion develops</li> </ul>
<b>Heat Stroke</b> is the most serious medical condition caused by extreme heat. It requires immediate emergency treatment. It can result in death without immediate medical attention.	High body temperature (104°F or higher) Hot, red, dry or damp skin Fast, strong pulse Headache	Dizziness Nausea Confusion Losing consciousness (passing out)	<b>Call 911 right away—heat stroke is a medical emergency</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move the person to a cooler place</li> <li>• Help lower the person's temperature with cool/cold bath, or misting/fanning or cool cloths, if a cool bath is not available.</li> <li>• Do not give the person anything to drink</li> </ul>	

## Gather water and other emergency supplies

Customize this [basic supply list](#) to meet your needs. Give yourself more time than usual to prepare your supplies. In the event of a power outage, your access to clean drinking water could be limited, so ensure that you set aside at least 1 gallon of clean drinking water per person per day. More water should be stored if you live in a hot climate or an extreme heat event is predicted. When deciding how much water to store, keep in mind that an average person needs to drink about three quarters of a gallon of fluid daily. Individual needs vary. You will also need stored water for food preparation and sanitation.

- Stay-at-home kit (2 weeks of emergency supplies): Include everything you need to stay at home for at least 2 weeks with items such as food, water, cleaning and disinfectant supplies, soap, paper products and personal hygiene items. Add drinks with electrolytes, should anyone become dehydrated or begin experiencing signs of heat-related illness. Include sunscreen and wide-brimmed hats.
- Evacuation kit (3 days of supplies in a “go bag”): Include everything you need if you have to leave your home and be on your own for 3 days during an extreme heat event — food, water, personal hygiene items, and cleaning and disinfectant supplies that you can use on the go (tissues, hand sanitizer with 60% alcohol and disinfection wipes).
- For COVID-19 protection, ensure that you have [cloth face coverings](#) for everyone in your home who can wear one safely.
- Prescription medication: Store a 30-day supply of prescription medicines in a waterproof, childproof container to take with you if you evacuate. For any medications, be sure to follow directions carefully.

### If you are able, take actions now to keep your home cool

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cover windows with drapes or shades.</li> <li>• Weather-strip doors and windows.</li> <li>• Use window reflectors, such as aluminum foil-covered cardboard, to reflect heat back outside.</li> <li>• Add insulation to keep the heat out.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use a powered attic ventilator or attic fan to regulate the heat level of your attic by clearing hot air.</li> <li>• Install window air conditioners and insulate around them.</li> </ul> |
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### Make a plan to stay cool and hydrated

- Know that spending a few hours each day in air conditioning can help prevent or reduce heat-related illness.
- If you have air conditioning in your home, be sure that it is in working order, and if possible, get it serviced by a qualified HVAC. Identify an alternate cool location in your community in the event of an extended power outage.
- If you do not have air conditioning in your home, identify a place with air conditioning where you can spend the warmest part of the day during a heat wave.
  - Contact a nearby neighbor, friend or relative who has air conditioning to see if it would be possible for you to spend some time each day with them to cool off.
  - Check to see if shopping malls or public libraries are open in your area and would be available during a heat wave.
  - Find out if your community plans to open public cooling centers during COVID-19 by reaching out to your local department of public health. Find contact information for state, local, and tribal governments and agencies at [usa.gov/state-tribal-governments](https://www.usa.gov/state-tribal-governments) and for local health departments at [naccho.org/membership/lhd-directory](https://www.naccho.org/membership/lhd-directory). Be sure to find out about the current COVID-19 guidelines for any public cooling center. For example, staff may take your temperature at the door, require that you wear a [cloth face covering](#) if you can do so safely and maintain physical distancing. These guidelines are important to follow because they help keep everyone safe. Remember, extreme heat can be deadly. In the event of a heat wave, don't hesitate to go to a safe and cool place outside your home.
- Plan how you will get to a cool place. If you need to share transportation, plan now. If you need to use public transportation, including paratransit, find out if schedules or services have been impacted by COVID-19. Plan out your route and make arrangements now.

- [Don't use an electric fan when the indoor air temperature is over 95°F](#). Using a fan can be more harmful than helpful when indoor air temperatures are hotter than your body temperature. Fan use may cause your body to gain heat instead of losing it. On very hot, humid days, sweat evaporates off the skin slower than normal, and fans make it even more difficult for your body to lose heat by sweating. Focus on staying hydrated, taking a cool shower or bath to cool your body, shutting out the sun and heat with curtains, and moving to an air-conditioned place to cool off.
- Remember, if you need to leave your home to cool off, be prepared to practice [physical distancing](#) by keeping at least 6 feet (about 2 arms' length) from people outside your household and wear a [cloth face covering](#), if you can do so safely. Wash hands frequently with soap and water. Soap and water are always preferable, but if they are not available use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. If you have to cough or sneeze, do so into your cloth face covering, or into a tissue or your elbow, not your hands.

### Be prepared for power outages

- Learn what to do in the event of a [power outage](#). Heat waves are often accompanied by power outages, as a result of thunderstorms, downed power lines, and because power grids may fail during high energy demand. Talk to your medical provider about a power outage plan for medical devices powered by electricity and refrigerated medicines. Find out how long medication can be stored at higher temperatures and get specific guidance for any medications that are critical for life.

### Utility assistance

- Contact the [Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program \(LIHEAP\)](#) for help. Many communities are implementing or expanding programs that provide financial assistance for households without air conditioning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many communities are also issuing temporary bans on utility shut-offs during heat waves to allow people to continue using home air conditioning.

### Build a team to help you

- If you are an older adult, live alone, have a medical condition, disability, need assistance walking, have low vision, or are blind, deaf or hard of hearing, create a personal support network made of several trusted individuals who can help you. Assign them practical things that they can do, such as checking in with you regularly, running errands, or getting groceries. Share your important health and medical information with them and be sure they know how they can help you. Make a plan with your support network to check in on you more frequently during a heat wave and assist you to get to a cool place, if needed.

### Be sure that you can monitor changing conditions

- Have access to weather alerts and community notifications so you can monitor changing conditions and receive instructions from local officials, even during a power outage. Always follow the directions of your state and local authorities.
- Sign up for free emergency notifications that your community offers. Download the free American Red Cross [Emergency App](#). Purchase a battery-powered radio so you can monitor conditions during a power outage.
- Make sure you know the types of notifications that you will receive, and what to do when you receive them. The [National Weather Service](#) issues heat advisories and excessive heat warnings when unusual periods of hot weather are expected.

Excessive Heat Outlook	Excessive Heat Watch	Excessive Heat Warning / Advisory
<p><b>Be Aware!</b> An Outlook is issued when the potential exists for an excessive heat event in the next 3-7 days. It provides information to individuals who need considerable lead-time to prepare for the event.</p>	<p><b>Be Prepared!</b> A Heat Watch is issued when conditions are favorable for an excessive heat event in the next 24 to 72 hours. It is used when the risk of a heat wave has increased but its occurrence and timing is still uncertain.</p>	<p><b>Take Action!</b> An Excessive Heat Warning or a Heat Advisory is issued within 12 hours of the onset of extremely dangerous heat conditions. Take precautions immediately to avoid heat-related illness</p>

## DURING: Stay connected, hydrated and cool

### Stay Connected

**Carefully monitor individuals at greater risk of heat-related illness in your family and neighborhood. Help them prevent heat-related illness.**

**Never leave infants, children, older adults, individuals with disabilities, or pets in a vehicle unattended, even if the windows are partially open or the engine is running, and the air conditioning is on.** Cars can quickly heat up to dangerous temperatures, even with a window cracked open. While anyone left in a parked car is at risk, children are especially at risk of getting a heat stroke and dying. Make it a habit to check your entire vehicle — front and back — before locking the door and walking away. [Train yourself to Park, Look, Lock, or always ask yourself "Where's Baby?"](#) When leaving your car, check to be sure everyone is out of the car. Do not overlook any children who have fallen asleep in the car. Always lock your car doors and trunk, year-round, so children can't get into unattended vehicles. Store car keys out of a child's reach and teach children that a vehicle is not a play area.

Carefully monitor individuals at greater risk of heat-related illness in your family and neighborhood. Check in on older adults/individuals with chronic health conditions at least twice daily while wearing a [cloth face covering](#) and maintaining a physical distance of six 6 feet. When visiting, ask yourself these questions:

- Are they drinking enough water?
- Do they have access to air conditioning?
- Do they know how to keep cool?
- Do they show any signs of heat stress?

**Be on the lookout for signs of heat-related illness.** [Act right away if you notice someone with symptoms.](#)

**If someone is showing [emergency warning signs of COVID-19](#) or [heat exhaustion/ heat stroke](#) do not delay seek emergency medical care immediately.**

### Stay Hydrated

**Drink plenty of fluids:** Drink more fluids. Don't wait until you're thirsty to drink. Avoid sugary, caffeinated, or alcoholic drinks. Avoid very cold drinks because they can cause stomach cramps.

**Encourage children to drink plenty of fluids, too.** Kids forget to drink and can become dehydrated quickly. Make sure kids are drinking plenty of fluids. Avoid really cold drinks or drinks with too much sugar.

**Replace salt and minerals:** Heavy sweating removes salt and minerals from your body that need to be replaced. A sports drink or a snack can replace the salt and minerals you lose in sweat.

**Keep pets hydrated:** Provide plenty of fresh water for your pets and leave the water in a shady area.

**Warning:** If your doctor limits the amount of water you drink or has you on water pills, ask how much you should drink while the weather is hot.

If you are on a low-salt diet, have diabetes, high blood pressure, or other chronic conditions, talk with your doctor before drinking a sports beverage.

### Stay Cool

**Stay cool indoors:** Stay in an air-conditioned place as much as possible. If your home does not have air conditioning, do not hesitate to go to your pre-designated cool location, while wearing a [cloth face covering](#) (if you can do so safely) and practicing physical distancing by keeping at least 6 feet from people who do not share your home. Keep children cool, too.

**Wear appropriate clothing:** Choose lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing. Do the same for infants and children.

[Don't use an electric fan when the indoor air temperature is over 95°F.](#) Using a fan can be more harmful than helpful when indoor air temperatures are hotter than your body temperature. Fan use may cause your body to gain heat instead of losing it. Focus on staying hydrated, taking a cool shower or bath to cool your body, shutting out the sun and heat with curtains, and moving to an air-conditioned place to cool off.

**Use your stove and oven less** to maintain a cooler temperature in your home. Avoid hot and heavy meals.

**Schedule outdoor activities carefully:** Try to limit your outdoor activity to when it's coolest, such as morning and evening hours. Rest often in shady areas so that your body has a chance to recover. Cut down on exercise during the heat.

**Wear sunscreen:** Sunburn affects your body's ability to cool down and can dehydrate you. If you must go outdoors, protect yourself from the sun by wearing a wide-brimmed hat, sunglasses and by using sunscreen as indicated on the package. Use sunscreens that say, "broad spectrum" or "UVA/UVB protection."

**If you must work outdoors,** see if tasks can be scheduled earlier or later in the day. Keep hydrated. Wear sunscreen. Wear a wide-brimmed hat and loose, lightweight, light-colored clothing. Spend time in air-conditioned buildings during breaks and after work. Encourage co-workers to take frequent breaks to cool off and hydrate. Use a buddy system.

## AFTER: Recover

### Take care of emotional health

Fear and anxiety about the COVID-19 pandemic can be overwhelming and cause strong emotions. When we experience a disaster or other stressful life event, we can have a variety of reactions, which may include:

- Feeling physically and mentally drained
- Having difficulty making decisions or staying focused on topics
- Becoming easily frustrated on a more frequent basis
- Arguing more with family and friends
- Feeling tired, sad, numb, lonely or worried
- Experiencing changes in appetite or sleep patterns

Most of these reactions are temporary and will go away over time. Try to accept whatever reactions you may have. Look for ways to take one step at a time. Keep a close eye on children.

- See [redcross.org](https://www.redcross.org) for more information on emotional recovery
- Free National [Disaster Distress Helpline](https://www.redcross.org/disaster-distress-helpline): Available to anyone experiencing emotional distress related to COVID-19 and other disasters. Call 1-800-985-5990 or text TalkWithUs to 66746 to speak to a caring counselor
  - Deaf/Hard of Hearing. Text TalkWithUs to 66746. Use your preferred relay service to call 1-800-985-5990. TTY 1-800-846-8517
  - Spanish Speakers. Call 1-800-985-5990 and press "2" or from the 50 States, text Hablanos to 66746. From Puerto Rico, text Hablanos to 1-787-339-2663
- If you are feeling overwhelmed with emotions such as sadness, depression, anxiety, or feel like you want to harm yourself or someone else, call 911 or the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)

### Sources

- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](https://www.cdc.gov)
- [Environmental Protection Agency](https://www.epa.gov)
- [National Weather Service](https://www.weather.gov)
- [Federal Emergency Management Agency](https://www.fema.gov)
- [National Highway Traffic Safety Administration](https://www.nhtsa.gov)
- [National Forest Service](https://www.fs.fed.us)
- [New York State Department of Health](https://www.health.ny.gov)
- [Global Heat Health Information Network](https://www.ghn.org)
- [International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies](https://www.ifrc.org)
- [World Health Organization](https://www.who.int)