



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND HEALTH SERVICES  
*Aging and Long-Term Support Administration*  
*PO Box 45600, Olympia, Washington 98504-5600*

June 28, 2021

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**PRECAUTIONS FOR RESIDENTS AND STAFF RELATED TO HEATWAVE**

Dear Provider/Administrator/Superintendent:

It is expected that temperatures across Washington will continue to reach triple digits this week. Both staff and residents must take necessary precautions to prevent complications related to excessive heat.

Residents with a history of dehydration, cardiovascular and/or pulmonary disease are particularly susceptible to heat-related illnesses and complications. All staff should be aware and monitoring for signs, symptoms, and consequences of heat exhaustion, heat stroke and heat cramps.

**Heat Exhaustion:**

- Warning Signals: Gradual weakness, nausea, anxiety, excess sweating, syncope (fainting).
- Appearance and Signs: Skin is pale, grayish, and clammy.
- Management: For syncope, place head down and administer cool, slightly salty fluids immediately.

**Heat Stroke (Serious Emergency):**

- Warning Signals: Headache, weakness, sudden or worsening confusion, and sudden loss of consciousness.
- Appearance and Signs: Hot, red, dry skin, little sweating, very high temperature, and hard, rapid pulse.
- Management: Immediately cool skin by wrapping or immersing in cold water or ice. Call 911 or paramedics.

**Heat Cramps:**

- Warning Signals: Severe cramps and spasms in the arms, legs and/or abdomen.
- Appearance and Signs: Skin may be hot and dry, or cool and clammy, depending on the humidity. The muscles feel like hard knots.
- Management: Provide cool fluids and foods containing sodium chloride (table salt).

The following measures should be taken to prevent heat-related illnesses. Some recommended interventions for your facility may include the following:

- Alert staff to monitor residents for the signs and symptoms of heat illness (listed above). Notify the resident's physician of such observations and obtain medical services as needed.

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- Review resident medications and identify those that may cause residents to become more susceptible to harm from heat and sunlight.
- Assure that facility policies and procedures for heat emergency situations are current, complete, and staff are trained.
- Monitor temperatures in care areas and resident rooms.
- Monitor choice of resident's clothing to ensure they are appropriate in extreme temperatures. Loose fitting, light colored cotton clothing is best to allow the skin to breathe.
- Help decrease temperatures by closing window blinds and turning off unneeded lights in the daytime.
- Assist residents to maintain adequate fluid intake. In addition to water, consider popsicles, Jell-O, sherbet, and juices to keep residents hydrated.
- When outside, encourage residents to sit in shaded areas and to use sunscreen.

This extreme heatwave should be treated as a major weather emergency, just like an extreme storm and the possibility of power outages. Generators and/or any auxiliary power systems should be tested, ensuring there is adequate fuel and supplies, and knowing what building systems will work if the system goes to their generator, including HVAC. Adequate water supplies, fuel, and plans to keep the residents sheltered in place for the next several days should be ready as resources will be depleted by the time the extreme weather arrives. Now is the time to pull out the facility emergency and disaster plans, ensure they are up to date, and that staff are educated on how and what to do.

Windows, doors and blinds need to stay closed during the daytime and after the outside temperature cools sufficiently, then opened at night to let the cool air into the building. For additional cooling guidance, please visit the [DOH Hot Weather Safety webpage](#).

Thank you for your continued commitment to resident health and safety. If you have any questions, please contact [RCSPolicy@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:RCSPolicy@dshs.wa.gov).

Sincerely,



Mike Anbesse, Director  
Residential Care Services

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