



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

May 10, 2024

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ALTSA: ALF #2024-015
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ALTSA: ESF #2024-016
ALTSA: ICF/IID #2024-011
ALTSA: NH #2024-021

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS CONSIDERATIONS FOR EXTREME HEAT

Dear Administrator/Provider/Superintendent:

High temperatures are expected across Washington State this summer. This letter is to remind facilities that now is the time to begin preparing for extreme heat. Extreme heat should be treated as a major weather emergency, just like an extreme storm and the possibility of power outages. 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.

Extreme heat has a strong correlation with deaths in long-term care settings. Residents with a history of dehydration, cardiovascular disease, 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.

Heat Cramps:

- Warning Signals: Severe cramps and spasms in the arms, legs, 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).

Resident Care Considerations:

- 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.

- 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.
- Provide additional showers or baths.
- When outside, encourage residents to sit in shaded areas and to use sunscreen.

Managing Heat within Facility

- Block direct sun from windows by using awnings, thermal curtains/blinds, and/or sun film on windows.
- Open windows (up to 6 inches maximum – windows secured) to bring in fresh air and to help with ventilation at night.
- Monitor indoor heat temperatures in all areas of the building for follow up care and attention of residents and employees. Ensure indoor temperatures remain below 26°C as per licensing standards.
- Identify cooling options/areas (e.g., cooler room(s), portable air conditioner, cooler shower) if possible, for residents and employees.

Reminder about Fan and Portable Air Conditioner (AC) Use

- If it is necessary to use fans or portable AC units, enhanced monitoring may be required. Please consult with your Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) Team for guidance.
- Fans should be cleaned regularly, at a minimal once a month with a neutral detergent or wipe after disconnection from the power source.
- If they are visibly dusty, they should be cleaned immediately. Perform hand hygiene when cleaning and handling air conditioner and fan parts.
- Remove any water sitting in the air conditioner pans when not in daily use - empty, clean and disinfect the drip pan and allow to dry completely before storing.
- Vent the portable AC units out windows, where possible.

Generators and auxiliary power systems should be tested regularly, ensuring there is adequate fuel and other supplies on hand, and knowing what building systems (including HVAC) will work when using a generator. Ensure adequate water supplies and fuel is available to shelter residents in place for several days should the need arise. Purchase supplies such as portable cooling systems before the summer seasons. Be ready as resources could be depleted by the time extreme weather occurs.

References and Further Information

- Preparing for Wildfire and Extreme Heat in LTC Settings: <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/sites/default/files/ALTSA/rcs/documents/Extreme%20Heat%20and%20Wildfire%20Prep.pdf>
- Ready.gov Extreme Heat: <https://www.ready.gov/heat>

Provider Letter: EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS CONSIDERATIONS FOR EXTREME HEAT

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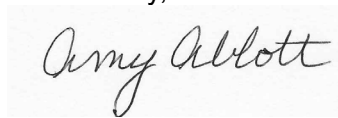
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- Fraser Health: Preparation for Extreme Heat in LTC Settings:
https://www.fraserhealth.ca/-/media/Project/FraserHealth/FraserHealth/Health-Topics/Long-term-care-licensing/Clinical-and-Safety-Information/LTC_AL_Planning_for_Extreme_Summer_Heat_Guidelines.pdf?rev=5c289d2b6e10481687ca3c26441a4529

Thank you for your continued commitment to resident health and safety. Please see the documents on the [Residential Care Services Internet page](#) for specific strategies that you may implement into your emergency plans. If you have any questions, please contact your local RCS Field Manager.

If you have any questions, please contact Richard Freed, Emergency Preparedness Coordinator, Richard.Freed@dshs.wa.gov, 360-819-7001.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy Abbott". The signature is written in a cursive style and is placed on a light gray rectangular background.

Amy Abbott, Director
Residential Care Services

DSHS: *"Transforming Lives"*