



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

June 8, 2023

AL TSA: NH #2023-025
EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS: REMINDER ABOUT MAXIMUM TEMPERATURES IN NURSING HOME SETTINGS

Dear Nursing Facility/Home Administrator:

Washington state expects to continue to see record high temperatures during the summer months including and up to triple digits over multiple days. These extreme temperatures can negatively affect individuals, especially those with chronic or acute medical conditions, behavioral health conditions, and vulnerable populations like nursing home residents. Both staff and residents must take necessary precautions to prevent complications related to excessive heat. Over the past few years, there has been an increase in the number of deaths reported related to exposure of extreme temperatures.

As the season approaches, the Department of Social and Health Services is reminding providers about the regulations requiring providers to maintain safe and comfortable temperatures in nursing homes.

The following rules apply to nursing homes:

[WAC 388-97-0880, Environment](#)

(3) Comfortable and safe temperature levels: (a) Facilities licensed after October 1, 1990, must maintain a temperature range of seventy-one to eighty-one degrees Fahrenheit; and (b) Regardless of external weather conditions, all nursing homes must develop and implement procedures and processes to maintain a temperature level that is comfortable and safe for residents.

F584 – Safe Environment

[42 CFR §483.10\(i\)\(6\)](#) Comfortable and safe temperature levels. Facilities initially certified after October 1, 1990, must maintain a temperature range of 71 to 81 degrees F.

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.

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- 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).

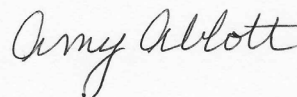
Some suggested interventions for your facility may include the following:

- 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.
- 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.
- Close windows, doors, and blinds during the daytime and open them at night after the outside temperature cools sufficiently. Please visit the [DOH Hot Weather Safety webpage](#).

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 be sure staff are educated on how and what to do. Generators and auxiliary power systems should be tested and to ensure there is adequate generator fuel and supplies are on hand, and 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. Be ready as resources could be depleted by the time extreme weather occurs.

If you have any questions, please contact Charles Demler, Policy Program Manager, at charles.demler@dshs.wa.gov.

Sincerely,



Amy Abbott, Director
Residential Care Services

DSHS: "Transforming Lives"