

Staying healthy in the heat

Prolonged hot weather can affect anybody. It may make existing medical conditions worse and can cause heat-related illness. In some cases heat effects may be fatal. It may also affect community infrastructure such as power supply and other support services.



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Who is at risk?

The heat can affect anyone, however some people are at a higher risk of harm. This includes:

- the elderly—especially those who live alone
- babies and very young children
- pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers
- people who suffer from a pre-existing medical condition—such as diabetes, kidney disease or mental illness
- people who take medication—such as allergy medicines (antihistamines), blood pressure and heart medications (beta-blockers), water pills (diuretics) and anti depressant or antipsychotic medications. If you take medication, consult with your doctor for more information
- people with an alcohol or other drug problem
- people with mobility problems or disability, who may not be able to identify or communicate their discomfort or thirst
- people who are physically active—such as manual workers and people who play sport.

Coping during prolonged heat

- Keep hydrated by drinking water regularly during the day. This generally means drinking two to three litres of water a day, depending on heat, humidity and your physical activity.
- If your doctor normally restricts your fluid intake, check how much to drink during hot weather. Drinking too much water can also be dangerous, so monitor the colour of your urine. It is recommended that your water consumption should ensure that your urine is light yellow.
- Avoid drinking carbonated drinks with high levels of sugar, caffeine and alcohol and very cold drinks.

- Eat smaller cool meals, such as salads. Do not take additional salt tablets unless prescribed by a doctor.
- Keep yourself cool. Use wet towels or scarves, put your feet in cool water or take cool (not cold) showers. Stay indoors in cool or air-conditioned facilities—either at home or at local shopping centres, libraries and cinemas.
- Close curtains and blinds, and open windows (if there is a cool breeze blowing) to reduce heat entering your home.
- Avoid strenuous outdoor activities. If you can't avoid outdoor activities don't go out in the hottest part of the day, stay in the shade, drink plenty of water and wear a hat and light coloured, loose fitting clothing. Ensure infants and children do too.
- Do not leave children, adults or animals in parked vehicles, even for a short period of time.
- Keep in touch with sick or frail friends, neighbours and relatives to ensure that they are coping with the heat wave conditions.
- Watch or listen to news reports for information about the heat wave.

Preparing for a heat wave

- Check air-conditioning at your home has been serviced and is working effectively.
- Ensure you have an enough food, water, medicines and toiletries to avoid going out in the heat.
- Store foods and medicines at a safe temperature. Find out more about food safety at www.health.qld.gov.au/foodsafety
- Consider your options if the heat wave causes a loss of electricity or disrupts public transport.
- Ensure you have a torch, fully charged mobile phone or a telephone that will work without electricity, a battery operated radio and sufficient batteries.
- Find ways to make your home cooler—such as installing awnings, shade cloths or external blinds on the sides of the house facing the sun. Dark metal shutters and dark curtains may absorb heat and make the room warmer and should be avoided. The use of pale curtains or reflective materials is better.

Heat-related illnesses

Heat cramps, heat exhaustion and heat stroke are the most common heat-related illnesses. Heat may worsen some pre-existing medical conditions, such as heart disease or diabetes.

Illness	Symptoms	What to do
Heat stroke (a life-threatening emergency)	<p>More severe and dangerous form of heat exhaustion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mental condition affected and may be deteriorating • hot, dry skin with no sweating • confusion • seizure • stroke-like symptoms or collapsing • unconsciousness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • call an ambulance. Seek urgent medical advice if ambulance delayed • do not give the person fluids to drink if consciousness affected or mental condition worsening, except on medical advice. Most important treatment is to cool the person • get the person to a cool area and lie them down • remove their clothing • wet their skin with cool (not icy) water, spray water on them. fan continuously. • position an unconscious person on their side and clear their airway
Heat exhaustion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pale complexion and sweating • rapid heart rate • muscle cramps, weakness • dizziness, headache • nausea, vomiting • fainting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • get the person to a cool area and lie them down • give cool drinks. Do not give alcohol, caffeine drinks or high sugar drinks • remove their outer clothing • wet their skin with cool water or wet cloths • seek medical advice
Heat cramps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • muscle pains • spasms in the abdomen, arms or legs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stop activity and sit quietly in a cool place • increase fluid intake • rest a few hours before returning to activity • seek medical help if cramps persist

Further information:

In an emergency, ring 000 for urgent advice from the Queensland Ambulance Service.

For more information or support following a heatwave:

- call 13 HEALTH (13 43 25 84) at any time for practical medical advice
- contact your doctor, hospital or health clinic
- visit the Queensland Health website for further information on sun safety www.health.qld.gov.au/sunsafety
- visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website for information on personal health and safety during a heat wave www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/heat_guide.asp
- contact your local Queensland Health public health unit.

For further information, contact your nearest Queensland Health public health unit:

Brisbane North Tel: 3624 1111
 Brisbane South Tel: 3000 9148
 Bundaberg Tel: 4150 2780
 Cairns Tel: 4226 5555
 Central Queensland Tel: 4920 6989
 Central West Tel: 4652 6000

Darling Downs Tel: 4631 9888
 Gold Coast Tel: 5668 3700
 Hervey Bay Tel: 4184 1800
 Logan Tel: 3412 2989
 Mackay Tel: 4911 0400
 Moreton Bay Tel: 3142 1800

Mount Isa and Gulf Tel: 4744 9100
 South West Tel: 4656 8100
 Sunshine Coast Tel: 5409 6600
 Townsville Tel: 4753 9000
 West Moreton Tel: 3413 1200