Department Education

Heat Health Policy

The purpose of this policy is to support schools to prepare for and manage risks associated with extreme hot weather and heat wave.

Summary

* Extreme heat or heatwave is a period of unusual and uncomfortable hot weather that can negatively affect health.
* Children and young people are more susceptible to heat stress and therefore schools must have measures in place to prepare for and manage the risks associated with extreme hot weather.
* Schools do not close at a certain temperature threshold during days of extreme heat; however, under emergency circumstances, schools may contact their regional Manager, Emergency Management and Operations to consider appropriate actions.

Details

Extreme heat or heatwave is a period of unusual and uncomfortable hot weather that can negatively affect health. Children and young people are more susceptible to heat stress. For this reason, schools must be able to recognise and respond to heat related illness and have strategies to manage the risks associated with extreme hot weather and heat wave.

Schools must:

* be able to recognise and treat heat related illness
* have strategies in place to manage the risks associated with periods of extreme heat, including early intervention, prevention and preparedness measures, as outlined below.

Schools do not close at a certain temperature threshold during days of extreme heat; however, under emergency circumstances, schools may contact their regional Manager, Emergency Management and Operations to consider appropriate actions.

**Early intervention**

It is important that school staff know the signs and symptoms of heat stress and how to respond. Treatment options vary according to the type of heat-related illness.

If a student, staff member or visitor shows any sign of heat exhaustion or heatstroke schools must apply first aid and seek medical assistance immediately.

Some heat-related illnesses and common symptoms include:

* deterioration in existing medical conditions
* heat rash
* heat cramps — these include muscle pains or spasms
* dizziness and fainting
* heat exhaustion — warning signs may include paleness and sweating, rapid heart rate, muscle cramps headache, nausea and vomiting, dizziness or fainting
* heatstroke — the person may stagger, appear confused, have a fit, collapse and become unconscious. This is a medical emergency and requires urgent attention.

Visit the Better Health website [Heat stress and heat-related illness](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/heat-stress-and-heat-related-illness) for detailed information.

**Prevention**

To minimise the risks associated with extreme hot weather schools must review and where practicable and appropriate implement the following:

* plan to address the consequences of extreme heat and responses for power outage(s), transport delays and/or cancellation, and articulate these arrangements in the risk assessment and response procedures of schools’ emergency and critical incident management plan
* modifying or postponing any planned vigorous activity
* consider having adequate shade on school grounds from man-made structures (tents, sails and umbrellas) and/or trees
* educate and encourage students and school staff to stay hydrated
* display heat guidelines and charts in prominent locations in the school for reminders around hydration and symptoms
* have water fountains located around the school premises
* review first aid kits and consider the inclusion of additional ice packs and hydrolytes.

**Preparedness**

Schools must:

* subscribe to the heat health alerts, advisories and newsletters for regular monitoring of outdoor weather conditions through the [Health Vic website](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/newsletters)
* download and subscribe to the [VicEmergency App](https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/vicemergency-app/%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)
* set up a ‘watch zone’ as per advice within the VicEmergency App, to receive these heat health alerts

During a period of extreme heat schools should also actively consider:

* utilising large industrial fans and/or ensuring indoor spaces have open doors and windows or air conditioning access during activities, especially during activity rest periods
* modifying or postponing any planned vigorous activity
* rescheduling/moving classes from classrooms with direct sunlight/no cooling
* closing any internal and external blinds
* selecting suitable uniform options
* measures to reduce risk to students in school council operated outside school hours care (OSHC)
* varying school hours by reducing midday recess to no less than 30 minutes and adjusting the dismissal time accordingly.

**Heat health alerts**

Upon receiving advice of a heat health alert schools must brief staff:

* on the school’s expectations in regard to management of the risks associated with extreme hot weather
* to be extra vigilant during periods of prolonged heat.

Schools are also encouraged to:

* notify parents/carers about school heat conditions and remind them to provide their child with water and apply SPF 50 sunscreen
* include information on the school's heat protective procedures and processes in a school newsletter or communication.

Other heat health messages

* Drink water — even if you don't feel thirsty, drink water. Take a bottle with you always.
* Hot cars kill — never leave children, adults or pets in hot cars. The temperature inside a parked car can double within minutes.
* Keep cool — seek out air-conditioned buildings, draw your blinds, use a fan, take cool showers and dress in light and loose clothing made from natural fabrics.
* Plan ahead — schedule activities in the coolest part of the day and avoid exercising in the heat. If you must go out, wear a hat and sunscreen and take a bottle of water with you.