

Extreme Heat Tip Sheet

The Northwest Healthcare Response Network (NWHRN) continues to work with local response partners to prepare for potential extreme heat events and their impacts. This Extreme Heat Tip Sheet is designed to support healthcare organizations and response agencies in their planning efforts and to reference if heat impacts are anticipated. State and regional responses to climate-related hazards continue to prove that organizations are most resilient and effective when partners are pro-active in their planning efforts, share and learn from each other, and most importantly, work together.

Advanced Planning for Extreme Heat Events

Extreme heat events are increasing in duration, frequency, and intensity because of climate change. These accelerating changes have led to a rise in human exposure to harmful temperatures. Extreme heat can lead to significant challenges for vulnerable individuals, communities, and healthcare facility operations. Risks are higher when events are particularly intense, long in duration, and/or accompanied by associated hazards. Extreme heat events have been shown to increase demand for healthcare services, impact critical infrastructure such as transportation, and challenge healthcare operations. Individual facilities, health systems, and response agencies should incorporate extreme heat into their planning efforts, which may include creating a heat-specific plans.

All organizations should consider the following before an extreme heat event:

- Review HVAC-system/air conditioner vulnerabilities, have backup systems identified and/or contracts for additional cooling capabilities. Waiting until extreme heat is in the forecast will limit options.
- Review additional critical systems that may be impacted by high temperatures.
 - IT servers, communication systems, sensitive medical equipment, etc.
- Evacuation planning in case of power loss or HVAC malfunction.
- Strategies for supporting most vulnerable employees and community members [\[list\]](#).
- Protocols to reduce staff, resident, and patient exposure to extreme heat and reduce health impacts [opportunities for hydration and cooling, frequent breaks, shifting schedules to minimize exposure to mid-day and evening heat, cancelling outdoor activities, etc.] – see [OSHA](#) & [CDC](#).
- Stay aware of heat risk forecasts throughout the heat season (June 1 – Sept 1): [NWS HeatRisk](#).
- Inventory of key supplies and plans to rapidly expand capabilities with surge in heat related illnesses (could include respiratory, cardiac, and heat stroke supplies/equipment such as ample ice, bags for ice immersion, evaporative cooling, etc.).
- Review patient surge plans – considering additional demand for space, staff, and resources.

When Anticipating or Experiencing an Extreme Heat Event

Healthcare organizations and response agencies experiencing or anticipating a high-risk-level extreme heat event should take additional steps to prepare and/or respond to direct and indirect impacts:

- **Consult facility preparation plan.** As early as possible:
 - Early planning with engineering/facility staff to discuss your cooling system capabilities and limitations related to the specific event.
 - Implement supply conservation strategies based on anticipated or current shortages (ice, fuel, medical supplies, etc.).
 - Review evacuation plans, and ready staff in case of power outages or cooling system failure.

- Creating specific cooling areas within your facility during power loss or cooling system failure can reduce the need for evacuation.
 - Consider potential heat/humidity impacts in operating rooms. Reschedule surgeries as necessary.
- Prepare for potential patient surges by reviewing procedural schedules and consider possible postponements; consider accelerating discharges by reviewing patients ready for or awaiting discharge.
- **Implement strategies to mitigate extreme heat impacts on patients, residents, and staff.**
 - Staff may want/need to sleep at your facility if conditions warrant. Review procedures, communicate with staff, and advise them on personal and home preparedness.
 - Take into consideration the possibility of staff and their families having to evacuate their homes, transportation impacts, school closures, and resulting complications.
 - Review staff and patient emergency alert procedures.
 - Review schedules of staff to ensure coverage, adequate transitions, and backup plans.
- **Monitor weather conditions:** Regularly review weather forecasts. When temperatures are forecast to be high-risk or very-high risk for most of the population ([NWS HeatRisk](#)), check in with key partners, begin upstaffing preparations, and alerting relevant leadership regarding immediate or anticipated activation of emergency operations/coordination center.
- **Monitor indoor conditions:** Throughout the extreme heat event, monitor indoor temperatures. Ensure staff know the signs of heat-related illness [[CDC](#)]. Monitor staff, residents, and patient comfort and health.
- **Communicate risks to patients/residents and families.** The best way to manage a surge in patients is to prevent it. The WA State Department of Health and local public health jurisdictions have information geared toward helping at risk communities, individuals, and families avoid the dangers of extreme heat. Reiterate these messages in all public- and patient-facing communication.
- **Share information.** Facilities may be differently affected by extreme heat conditions. Facilities serving larger at-risk communities may experience a greater surge of heat related illness than other facilities in the region. Sharing operational status with the NWHRN and other relevant partners will ensure regional awareness and the need for greater regional coordination of healthcare resources.

How to reach NWHRN

If you anticipate or are currently experiencing impacts from extreme heat, do not hesitate to reach out to the NWHRN so we can support you.

Support from the NWHRN

- **24/7 Duty Officer Line at 425-988-2897.**
- Regular NWHRN Coalition coordination calls.
- Distribution of situational awareness snapshots and reports. To join the distribution list, please email info@nwhrn.org.
- District coordination meetings are a good opportunity to discuss plans and concerns outside an immediate response. [Check the calendar](#) for the next district meeting or [contact your district coordinator](#).