

Extreme Heat Tip Sheet

The Northwest Healthcare Response Network (NWHRN) works with healthcare coalition partners to prepare for extreme heat events and their impacts. This tip sheet equips healthcare organizations and response agencies in their planning efforts for this hazard and can be referenced if/when heat impacts are anticipated. Responses to climate-related hazards continue to show that organizations are most resilient to climate-related hazards when partners are proactive in their planning efforts, share and learn from each other, and work together.

Advanced Planning for Extreme Heat Events

Extreme heat events are increasing in duration, frequency, and intensity. These events 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. Heat-related risks increase 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, and challenge healthcare operations. Individual facilities, health systems, and response agencies should all incorporate extreme heat into their planning efforts, which may include creating 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 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 midday 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 and National Integrated Heat Health Information System \(Heat.gov\)](#).
- Inventory of key supplies and plans to rapidly expand capabilities with surge in heat-related illnesses (including but not limited to 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 an 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 ([DOH](#)) and local public health jurisdictions (LHJ) have information specifically 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.** Extreme heat conditions may affect facilities differently. Facilities serving at-risk communities may experience a greater surge of heat-related illness than other facilities. Sharing operational status with NWHRN and other relevant partners helps ensure regional awareness and aids regional coordination of healthcare resources.

Support from NWHRN

If you anticipate or are currently experiencing impacts from extreme heat, please reach out to NWHRN so we can support you.

NWHRN will:

- Provide situational awareness specific to the event.
- Activate as needed to support healthcare partners which may include:
 - Coordination of information and response activities, including resource requesting, coordination with local public health and emergency management partners.
 - Real-time convening of impacted organizations to share information.
 - Work to collectively problem solve, provide patient tracking support and other assistance as needed.

NWHRN works with partners through the varying organizational and reporting structures specific to their community. NWHRN recognizes that healthcare systems cross-geographical boundaries and are not bound by a specific jurisdiction. Because of this, NWHRN mirrors this multi-jurisdictional, regional healthcare approach and adapts to meet the needs of healthcare while honoring local health jurisdiction oversight. NWHRN maintains updated contact information for healthcare coalition members and will notify appropriate partners upon activation.

Contacting NWHRN:

- **24/7 Duty Officer Line at 425-988-2897.**
- Regular NWHRN Coalition coordination calls such as the All-Hazards call.
- Distribution of situational awareness reports. To join the distribution list, please email info@nwhrn.org.