

# WHAT IS A HEAT WAVE?



**DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT IS EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS**



[www.capetown.gov.za/disaster](http://www.capetown.gov.za/disaster)



**CITY OF CAPE TOWN  
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## WHAT IS A HEAT WAVE?

According to the South African Weather Service a heat wave is “when for three days the maximum temperature is five degrees higher than the mean maximum for the hottest month”.

Cape Town experiences a Mediterranean type climate, characterised by cool, wet winters and hot, dry summers. One of the main characteristics of such regions is that they are all situated near large bodies of water, resulting in moderate temperatures with a comparatively small temperature range between the summer maximum and winter minimum. The adjacent water bodies are also responsible for a cooling effect in the coastal areas, which in many cases prevent temperatures from reaching their maximum highs.

At times during the summer, coastal lows (locally known as berg winds) move over the area, causing the temperature to increase to sometimes uncomfortable levels. Hot air blows into Cape Town from the Karoo interior, mainly in February and early March.



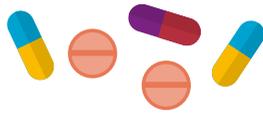
## WHAT TO DO: BEFORE

### Learn How to Stay Hydrated

- You need to drink enough water to prevent heat illness.
- You can check that you are getting enough water by noting your urine colour. Dark yellow may indicate you are not drinking enough.
- Avoid sugary, caffeinated and alcoholic drinks.
- If you are sweating a lot, combine water with snacks or sports drink to replace the salt and minerals you lose in sweat.

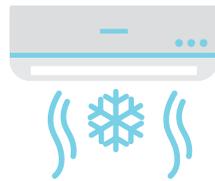
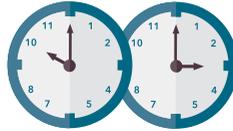


- Talk to your doctor about how to prepare if you have a medical condition or are taking medicines.



## Make a Plan to Stay Cool

- Do not rely only on electric fans during extreme heat.
- Stay indoors in the coolest room of your home as much as possible and splash your face with cold water to cool down.
- Reduce time spent in the sun between 10:00 and 15:00. In extremely hot weather conditions, it is advisable to stay indoors during this time of the day if possible.
- Moving to an air-conditioned place is a much better way to cool off.
  - If you have air conditioning, be sure that it is in working order.
  - If you do not have air conditioning or if there is a power outage, find locations where you can stay cool. For example, a public library or shopping mall.
- Make sure you have plenty of lightweight, loose clothing to wear.



## Gather Emergency Supplies

- Gather food, water and medicine. Organize at least three days of supplies in a Disaster Supply Kit that you can carry with you. Include backup batteries and chargers for your devices.
- In the event of a power outage, you may lose access to clean drinking water. Set aside at least four litres of drinking water per person per day. Consider adding drinks with electrolytes.
- Include sunscreen and wide-brimmed hats.
- Consider keeping a list of your medications and dosages on a small card to carry with you.



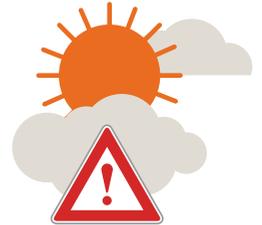
## Learn Emergency Skills

- Learn how to recognize and respond to heat illness.
- Learn First Aid and CPR.



## Plan to Stay Connected

- Listen to alerts on the radio and television for up-to-date weather reports.
- Understand the types of weather warnings you may receive and plan to respond when you receive them.



## WHAT TO DO: DURING

### Stay Hydrated

- Drink plenty of water and other fluids.
- Avoid alcohol. Drinks containing alcohol can actually worsen dehydration.
- Replace salt and minerals with snacks or a sports drink.



### Stay Cool

- Air conditioning saves lives during periods of extreme heat. If your residence does not have air conditioning, seek relief in public spaces such as shopping malls and libraries.
- Wear lightweight, loose clothing and take cool showers or baths.
- Limit your outdoor activity. If you must work outdoors, schedule tasks earlier or later in the day.



- Cyclists are encouraged not to cycle as they can sustain heat-stroke and cardiac problems.
- Never leave anyone in a vehicle while you run to do a quick errand. Not a pet, not a child, not anyone. It is never safe. The inside of a vehicle can overheat quickly and become an oven. People can succumb to heat exposure and death very quickly in a closed vehicle.
- Take care of animals and pets - they should not be directly exposed to the sun.



## Prevent Heat Illness

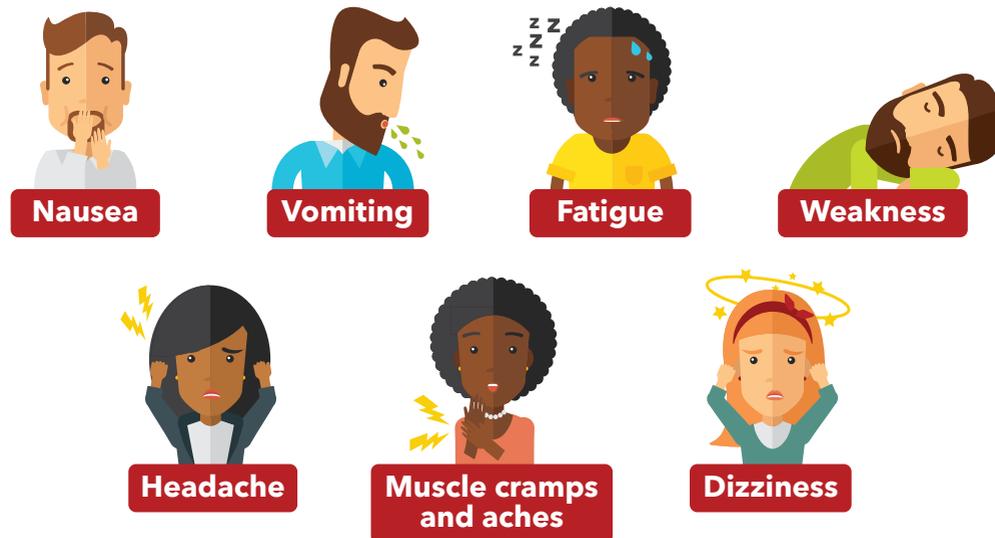
Check on your friends, family and neighbours. Help them prevent heat illness. Act fast if you notice someone with symptoms. Anyone can develop heat illness. However, people at greater risk are:

- Older adults
- Infants, children and pregnant women
- People with medical conditions
- Outdoor workers
- People with limited personal resources
- People living in places that lack green spaces



## Signs and symptoms of heat exhaustion

Some individuals can develop symptoms of heatstroke suddenly and rapidly without warning. People may show different symptoms and signs of heatstroke.



## Signs and symptoms of heatstroke

- High body temperature
- The absence of sweating, with hot red or flushed dry skin
- Rapid pulse
- Difficult breathing
- Strange behaviour
- Hallucinations
- Confusion
- Agitation
- Disorientation
- Seizure
- Coma
- A patient must be referred to a medical doctor if any of these signs are present.

## WHAT TO DO: AFTER

### Take Care of Yourself

- It is normal to have a lot of bad feelings, stress or anxiety.
- Eat healthy food and get enough sleep to help you deal with stress.



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