

COOLING FACILITIES – INFORMATION SHEET

Using air conditioning or visiting cool environments can be highly effective in minimizing heat fatalities, especially for people with chronic conditions or those taking medications that interfere with thermoregulation.

Despite its benefits, air conditioning may contribute to an increase in greenhouse gases and air pollution if the energy consumed is from burning fossil fuel. It therefore should not be relied on as the only solution for addressing risks to health from extreme heat in a community. Long-term preventative actions are necessary to address heat-health risks in a sustainable manner.

WHAT IS A COOLING FACILITY ?

Many families and individuals do not have air conditioning in their home. For this reason, some communities offer cooling facilities as part of their response measures. These include air-conditioned public places or recreation facilities such as:

- libraries
- recreational or community centres/halls
- city halls
- places of worship
- senior centres or legions
- bingo halls
- shelters
- cool rooms in apartment buildings established by landlords
- school gyms
- museums
- shopping malls
- movie theatres
- swimming pools
- spray pads
- public beaches or tree-shaded parks

WHAT SHOULD A COOLING FACILITY PROVIDE ?

When appropriate, cooling facilities should have back-up energy sources in case of power failures, as well as provide access to:

- drinking water
- cots, if needed
- medical supplies
- heat-health education material
- trained staff or volunteers who have excellent interpersonal skills, can recognize signs and symptoms of heat illnesses and who know actions to take in case of illness
- a safe and secure environment



OTHER COOLING FACILITY CONSIDERATIONS

Research has revealed some limitations in the effectiveness of community cooling centres in reducing heat-health risks among the most vulnerable older adults. To successfully reduce morbidity and mortality, cooling facilities should be made available during extreme heat events and be supported by:

- rigorous outreach and communication strategies
- accessibility features
- provision of amenities tailored to the unique needs of the visitors (e.g. older adults, homeless people, parents with children, pet owners)
- location in areas frequented by people requiring cooling
- convenient hours of operation
- the use of existing facilities known by and already catering to vulnerable people

The use of cooling facilities should be carefully evaluated and the results applied to improve their use.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR THE SUCCESSFUL USE OF COOLING FACILITIES

- Identify and highlight the existence of cooling facilities well before an extreme heat event occurs
- Provide a clear description of the cooling facilities (i.e. who they are for, what type of services visitors are likely to receive, whether pets are welcome)
- Identify credible messengers for each target group to deliver information
- Use multiple communication channels to reach those who should be using the cooling facilities
- Educate the public about heat-health risks and the importance of cooling during an extreme heat event
- Reach "shut-ins" (e.g. those with limited social interaction) and those with a false sense of safety, which could prevent them from taking protective actions
- Educate the public on the signs used to identify cooling facilities (e.g. "Cool Down Here" sign) and on their locations
- Encourage friends, neighbours, relatives and volunteers ("buddies") to actively seek out people in need of cooling and to help them stay healthy in the heat
- Encourage the public to welcome family and neighbours when they need a place to cool off

For further information pertaining to cooling facilities and heat-health related resources visit the [OneHealth Environmental Public Health Services Resource Hub for Alberta First Nations – Community Emergency Facilities](#) and/or the [Alberta Extreme Heat website](#), or contact your area Environmental Public Health Officer.

Adapted from Health Canada's Heat Alert and Response Systems to Protect Health: Best Practices Guidebook.

