



EXTREME HEAT/HEAT WAVE

Please note that the foundation messages are included in the previous section: Key messages for all-hazards household and family disaster planning. Separate messages are also available for other specific hazards.

A heat wave is an extended period of unusually high temperatures and often high humidity that causes temporary modifications in lifestyle and may have adverse health effects on the affected population. The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) defines a heat wave as a period during which the daily maximum temperature exceeds for more than five consecutive days the maximum normal temperature by 9 degrees Fahrenheit (5 degrees Celsius), the *normal* period being defined as 1961–1990. Because of global warming, the frequency, duration, and severity of heat waves are predicted to increase in most parts of the world. The impacts on human health, regional economies, and ecosystems may be significant.

Since 1950, the number of heat wave incidents worldwide has increased and the duration of these has

become longer. Heat wave impacts even otherwise heat-tolerant populations. For example, in 2015 cases of more than 1,100 deaths were reported across India, it was exceptionally hot in Morocco, Portugal and Spain (May), and across Europe (June–July). In the latter case, scientists said it was virtually certain that climate change increased the likelihood of this particular heat wave.³

Extreme heat can lead to people suffering from shock, getting dehydrated, developing acute heat illnesses and worsening of chronic cardiovascular and respiratory diseases. National Societies can promote simple heat preparedness measures outlined here.

Resource for further reference: Small and simple actions to address climate change. Geneva: IFRC, 2016.

³ climatecentre.org/news/616/ifrc-science-partners-european-heatwave-exacerbated-by-climate-change



Assess and plan

Key messages	Context-specific details
Know your area's vulnerability to extreme heat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn about the risks and potential impacts of extreme heat that can impact your location. • Find out about communication channels for early warning of very hot days in your region.
Be aware of protection and shelter around you	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware of the shade that trees can provide. • Look for shade facilities in cities such as storefronts, traffic booths etc. • Work with your community to identify places for community members to go and cool off during heat and power outages.
Know and raise awareness of the dangers of heat waves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan for how to change and adapt essential activities during a heat wave in order to avoid exposure to direct sunlight. • Understand the symptoms of heat-related illness and know expedient treatment and where to seek medical attention. • Be aware if you are part of a potentially affected group.
Know your nearest points of medical support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hospitals and medical centres can potentially offer ice, cooled water and other support.
Prepare warning mechanisms in the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involve youth and volunteers to support with extra care and activities in communities. • Instruct health workers and community members in the specific risks of heat waves and train them to respond quickly.



Mitigate risks: physical or environmental

Key messages	Context-specific details
Prepare tools to build temporary cooling/shade structures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Construction of cooling and/or shade areas is all the more difficult in extreme heat; preparation in time of less heat can facilitate such tasks.
Protect your living space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep rooms cool by using shades or reflective material outside the windows. If this is not possible, use light-coloured curtains and keep them closed (metallic blinds and dark curtains can make the room hotter). Ensure your home has air conditioning if possible.
Adapt your eating and drinking habits to stay hydrated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan ahead to make sure you have enough supplies, such as food, water and any medication required. Eat small meals but eat more frequently. Drink even if you do not feel thirsty. Map points of potable water in the community to be aware of where you can rehydrate yourself.
Modify daily routines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Try to avoid sport and heavy exercise or working during peak hours of the day.



Prepare to respond: develop skills and store provisions

Key messages	Context-specific details
Stay informed: monitor weather, listen to the radio and follow instructions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor the weather closely to see if extreme hot weather conditions, a heat wave watch or warning is expected in your area (usually there will be several days of lead time).
Avoid direct exposure to the sun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep out of the sun, especially during peak hours. If you are outside during peak hours, walk in the shade, and cover your head using a wide-brimmed hat, parasol, or turban. Use sun protection/sunscreen with a high level of UVA/UVB protection.
Protect yourself with appropriate clothing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wear loose-fitting, lightweight, light-coloured clothing. Avoid dark colours since they absorb heat.
Stay hydrated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Always carry a bottle of water. Assist others: hand out water during events, traffic jams, to people at risk. Remind the elderly, who lack thirst stimulus, to drink regularly (offer more water and soup) – one should drink at least 2 litres of water per day. Avoid alcoholic drinks, too much of sweet and/or very cold drinks since these can cause stomach cramps.

Be aware of the symptoms of heat induced sickness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek medical help if symptoms such as breathlessness, chest pain, confusion, weakness, dizziness or cramps get worse or do not go away. • Medical attention is needed if heat cramps last more than one hour. • Rest immediately in a cool place if you have painful muscular spasms and drink oral rehydration solutions containing electrolytes. • Cancel strenuous activities planned or reschedule them until the coolest time of the day.
Connect with your peers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use a buddy system when working in extreme heat, and reach out to those that are at risk or vulnerable.
Stay aware of people and animals at risk around you	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check on family, friends and neighbours who do not have air conditioning, who spend much of their time alone or who are more likely to be affected by the heat. • Check on your animals frequently to ensure that they are not suffering from the heat. • Stimulate solidarity and ask people to reach out proactively to support the elderly and chronically ill during times of extreme heat (family, neighbours, friends). • Never leave an animal inside a vehicle on a hot day.
Cool yourself down	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have cold drinks and avoid excess alcohol, caffeine, and hot drinks. • Eat cold foods, particularly those with high water content. • Take a cool shower. • Keep curtains or blinds closed indoors. • Use air conditioning or fans if the temperature outside is above 95 degrees Fahrenheit (35 degrees Celsius) with high humidity. • Keep a damp cloth on the back of your neck.