



Summer Safety: How to Beat the Heat



In the summer the combination of high heat and humidity can be dangerous for some people.

Many people know the temperature outside because they hear it on the news, or they have a thermometer outside their house to measure it, but the humidex level is also important to be aware of during the summer months.

The humidex tells us how hot the weather feels to the average person. It combines the temperature and humidity into one number, taking into account the two most important factors that affect summer comfort.

The current humidex levels can be found at Environment Canada's website at www.weatheroffice.ec.gc.ca. (Note: Only humidex levels above 30°C are calculated and displayed. At lower temperatures, the humidex is too close to the actual temperature to make a difference.)

A humidex level of 40°C is high enough to cause health problems for most people. However, some people can become sick at a humidex level of 35°C.

Those most at risk include:

- the elderly
- people with certain chronic conditions (such as heart or lung problems) or people who can't move or change position by themselves.
- infants and preschool children
- people who exercise or work outdoors for prolonged periods
- people taking certain medications, especially those taken for mental health conditions. (Please consult your doctor or pharmacist.)

How to avoid heat-related illness:

- Never leave a child in a parked car or sleeping outside in direct sunlight.
- Drink lots of water and natural juices even if you don't feel very thirsty. Avoid alcoholic drinks and drinks that have caffeine (such as coffee or cola).
- If you have to go outside in severe heat, stay in the shade as much as possible and go out early in the morning or evening when it is cooler. Wear a hat and light, loose fitting clothing
- Take advantage of air conditioned or cool places like shopping malls, libraries,

community centres or a friend's place. Fans alone may not provide enough cooling when the temperature is high.

- If you don't have air conditioning, keep curtains or blinds closed on the sunny side of your home, but keep windows slightly open.
- Keep electric lights off or turned down low.
- Take a cool bath or shower periodically or cool down with cool, wet towels.
- Avoid using your oven and eat light meals.
- Avoid intense or moderately intense physical activity. When humidex levels are above 35 °C, organizers of outdoor sports or recreational activities should consider adding more rest and water breaks. Above 40 °C, organizers should consider postponing sports activities to a cooler point in the day, or moving the event indoors to an air conditioned spot.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist regarding side effects of your medications.
- Check on elderly or sick neighbours or friends.

Get help from a friend, relative or a doctor right away if you:

- Feel confused, disoriented, delirious or begin to lose consciousness

OR

- Have a heart condition or other chronic illness and feel like your condition is getting worse because of the heat.

Friends and relatives can help someone with heat-related illness by doing the following:

- Call for help.
- Remove extra clothing from the person.
- Cool the person with lukewarm water, by sponging or bathing.
- Move the person to a cooler location.
- Give the person sips of cool water, not ice cold water.

In an emergency, call 911.

This fact sheet has been adapted with permission from material prepared by Toronto Public Health.

