

# Community care workers and volunteers during extreme heat

## Heat-related illnesses: prevention and preliminary care



### Table 1: Heat-related illnesses and high-risk clients

#### Recognizing Risk

- During extreme heat, clients who are bedridden or have reduced ability to care for themselves are at greatest risk for heat-related illnesses and death.
- Clients who remain in hot homes alone are also at high risk.

#### Simple actions to avoid heat-related illnesses

- Be aware of the temperature indoors and outdoors, and change physical activity accordingly.
- Ensure each client has regular periods of cooling.
- Provide drinking water and encourage rest until the client feels refreshed.
- Cool the body; have the client take a cool bath/shower, or sponge cool water while fanning.

### Table 2: Community care for preventing heat-related illnesses

Community care for preventing heat-related illnesses (Please refer to the "Health Professionals" link under "Support and Guidance" on the COVID-19 webpage for advise on public health measures to be taken when working with vulnerable populations.)

#### Check on client

- Check client on arrival to see how he or she is coping.
- Does the client comment about experiencing discomfort in the heat?
- Does he or she show any physical signs of distress:
  - **slower than usual moving to answer the door;**
  - **appearing or complaining of not feeling well; and**
  - **appearing disoriented**
- Monitor for indicators of heat-related illnesses (that is, extreme thirst, decreased urination with unusually dark yellow urine colour, either pale or flushed skin, tiredness, weakness, dizziness, headache, fainting, nausea, vomiting, rapid breathing and heartbeat, muscle cramps).
- Recognizing client at particular risk to extreme heat:
  - **what is the state of the client's mobility, mental and/or physical health?**
  - **do they have the physical and mental capability to escape the heat?**
  - **do they have access to transportation for this?**
  - **do they need help to keep their environment cool or move to a cooler place?**
  - **Is the client taking any medications making him/her more susceptible to heat?**
- Notify the office or supervisor as outlined by your organization's policy (if cause for concern).
- If a client is unusually confused, very hot but not sweating, call 911 because this may be heat stroke, which is a medical emergency.
- Before leaving, check if the client has a number by their telephone (relatives, friends, etc.) to call if he or she feels unwell or for someone to check in on him or her.
- If a client does not answer the door for an expected meeting or service, notify your supervisor **immediately**.

#### Help keep the home cool and food safe

- **Ensure the windows are shut and curtains are closed during the hottest part of the day.**
- **When the temperature is cooler in the evening, open the windows (if it safe to do so).**
- **Make sure that available electric fans, air conditioning are used.**
- **Ensure that food is properly stored, and spoiled food is discarded.**
- **Clients who live in upper-level apartments are at greatest risk of being exposed to heat.**
- **Record and note the temperature in the living space during your visit. You will be able to tell if the temperature is increasing on your next visit.**

#### Help keep the client cool

- Sponge the client or give bath with cool water; soak hands, forearms, and/or feet in cool water basin; spray cool water on skin while fanning; prepare a cloth with cool water to apply to the neck and armpits.
- Dress client with loose-fitting, light-coloured clothing made of breathable fabric.
- Client should regularly consume liquid (especially water) even when not thirsty.
- The client should eat fruits and vegetables that are high in water content.
- Do not use the oven; instead, use stove top or microwave.
- Make sure client has a glass of water beside him or her before leaving.