



Heat Waves

Why is our climate changing?

The atmosphere of the earth contains the air that we breathe, protects us from radiation and keeps our planet warm. Gases in our atmosphere, called "greenhouse gases", hold in the heat. About a hundred and fifty years ago, we began to burn large amounts of fossil fuels (oil, coal and natural gas) to create power and heat. These fuels release carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into our air. In fact, billions of tons of greenhouse gases are added to the atmosphere every year. This is like throwing an extra blanket on the bed - it traps in more heat and warms our planet, causing our climate to change. And this will, in turn, affect our weather.

Average temperatures in Canada are already rising. Scientists predict that, over the next century, Canada will be 1.5°C - 5°C warmer in the South and as much as 5°C - 7°C warmer in the North. Even a small increase in the average yearly temperature could have serious consequences that would affect our health, and especially that of our children.

What happens during a heat wave?

Times when the thermometer is over 30°C day after day can be dangerous. If the humidity is also high, the danger increases. High humidity, meaning lots of moisture in the air, can make a 32°C day feel more like it is 36°C or higher. Weather forecasters often give us the "humidex" - the heat we feel as a combined result of the temperature and the humidity, as well as the actual temperature. Scientists predict that climate change will lead to more and longer heat waves. For most of us this will mean more discomfort, but for others, it could be life threatening.

What are the dangers?

Heat stress is an immediate risk

Very hot weather can cause your body's temperature to rise abnormally high. Heat stress in infants, young children, the ill and the elderly can pose a serious threat to their health, and in some cases, actually cause death.

Playing active sports outdoors, working or even lounging in the sun for an extended period of time during a heat wave can cause problems. Restrict your children's active outdoor play, including organized sports such as soccer, football or cycling during heat waves.

Among those at higher risk are children living in homes where windows and doors must be kept closed during the heat to keep out noise, dirt, or pollution. The one in five children in Canada who live in poverty are more likely to be exposed to these living conditions. They are also more likely to live in buildings that are poorly insulated and have poor ventilation, all risk factors for heat stress.

If children appear faint or drowsy, with hot, dry skin, sponge them down immediately with cold water or wrap them naked in a wet sheet, give them cool water to drink, and seek medical attention.

Heat waves can cause food to go bad quickly

Most foods in Canada are stored and handled properly, but when heat waves hit, foods spoil sooner and extra precautions should be taken.

Summer is a time when we tend to barbecue, picnic or eat outdoors more often. This means that food has to be transported or handled more than usual. Serious risk of "E.coli", commonly called "hamburger disease", can occur if raw

hamburger is not cooked long enough to kill all the bacteria. Other foods, such as potato salad, deviled eggs and macaroni salad made with mayonnaise dressing, which are commonly eaten at outdoor events, can also be a source of food poisoning if not stored properly.

Be sure to keep foods cold at all times and cook hamburger until all the meat is well done. Wash your hands, plates and utensils that have come into contact with raw meats before touching anything or anyone. If you can't keep food cold, choose foods that do not need to be cold such as juices and crackers.

CHILDREN are at greatest risk!

Children are the least able to cope with the potential impacts of heat waves.

- Children's bodies are less developed and less able to regulate their body temperature during very hot weather.
- Infants are not able to move out of dangerously hot situations and must rely on adults to keep them safe.
- Young children will not recognize signs of heat stress and dehydration.
- Children are at risk of serious injury if left unattended in a car on a hot day. **NEVER** leave children unattended in a vehicle.
- Children are more susceptible to food poisoning and need parents and caregivers to make sure that the food they are eating has been handled, cooked and stored properly.

What can YOU do to fight climate change?

All Canadians contribute to greenhouse gas emissions - every time we do anything that uses energy. In fact, the actions of individual Canadians account for 28 percent of Canada's total greenhouse gas emissions - that's almost 5 tons per person per year!

Cut back your use of energy

- Car pool, walk or cycle to reduce your car use.
- Buy a fuel-efficient car.
- Every year Canadians idling their cars produce almost 4,000 tons of carbon dioxide and other pollutants! Avoid idling your vehicle - ten seconds of idling uses more fuel than restarting your engine.
- Add extra insulation to your house and use weather stripping and caulking to seal windows and cracks where heat escapes from your home. This will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and could save up to 20 percent on your heating bill.
- Turn down the heat in cold weather and use fans on warm days. Be sure to drink plenty of fluids during all warm weather because of an increased risk of dehydration.
- Upgrade your windows to the energy efficient types.
- Plant a tree - a large tree can help keep your home cool, protect it from wind and trees absorb carbon dioxide - a greenhouse gas!

Get Active!

Take your concern about climate change to your Member of Parliament, MPP and local politicians. Tell your elected officials and utilities operators that you support efficient and environmentally friendly sources of energy. Use your consumer power to support new, green technologies.

Get Informed!

To learn more about the impacts of climate change on your children's health, visit the Canadian Institute of Child Health website at www.cich.ca. For more information about climate change and what you can do, visit the Government of Canada climate change website at www.climatechange.gc.ca or call 1-800-O-CANADA (1-800-622-6232).

Funding provided by the Climate Change Action Fund

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This publication does not necessarily represent the views of the Government of Canada.

Ce feuillet d'information est également disponible en français



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