

It's really hot!

Campaign intended for people with mental health problems

Additional information for mental health care providers

Background

In July 2010, Québec experienced an exceptional heat wave. Of the 93 heat-related community deaths that occurred in Montréal, a third were people with mental health problems, 13 of whom were suffering from schizophrenia. In addition, some of these people had been contacted by friends, family members, neighbours or health professionals in the 24 hours preceding death. Therefore, in some cases, the preventive actions to take were not well explained, understood or adopted. Professionals from the Estrie, Capitale-Nationale and Montréal public health departments conducted a study to identify the most effective ways to transmit prevention messages to people with mental health problems. Focus groups that included health professionals, people with mental health problems, and family and friends of the latter were held in Montréal, Sherbrooke and Québec City. The communications strategy is the result of these focus groups.

Communications strategy

Focus group participants recommended that the information be passed on through direct contact with a mental health care provider, friend or family member, or someone in a position of trust. The relationship between a client and a person of trust is a factor that could foster understanding and encourage adoption of preventive measures. Therefore, it is preferable that the pamphlet be given out and explained in person, and that prevention messages are explained.

Messages to convey

- 1) The two main messages to pass on are the following:
 - **Spend at least two hours a day in a cool or air-conditioned place**
 - This can be an air-conditioned room or the coolest room in the house, a common room in a public place or building such as a shopping mall or library. Using a fan is not the same as air conditioning; there is no consensus regarding the benefits of using a fan during heat waves, when the air outdoors and indoors is very hot.
 - The health risks are eliminated when a person spends 24 hours in an air-conditioned place.

- **Drink a lot of water even before you feel thirsty or follow the recommendations of your doctor**
 - o The quantity of fluids indicated on the card is intended for the general public. However, the specific amount of water recommended for an individual may vary depending on underlying medical conditions. During a heat wave, drinking 4 glasses of water or juice a day is considered a minimum. The exception would be based on a doctor's recommendation. It is important to assess one's intake, as drinking too much can also cause health problems. All liquids are recommended except alcohol.
- 2) Other messages to pass on:
- Take at least one cool shower or bath a day, or wet your skin with a damp towel; the more you cool off by taking baths, showers or using a wet towel, the better protected you are.
 - Wear light clothing.
 - If you have any health-related questions, call 811. In case of emergency, call 911.

The same preventive measures apply to everyone. However, the 2010 heat wave showed that people with mental health problems are more vulnerable to the effects of heat than the general population. The same applies to other groups, like seniors. People with mental health problems can have several risk factors that make them more vulnerable during heat waves: social isolation, dressing inadequately for the heat, an altered perception of heat, and other underlying diseases.

Prescription drugs and heat

Changing the dosage or stopping your medication during a heat wave without the advice and required follow up by a doctor can be hazardous to your health. The best way to avoid heat-related health problems is to apply these simple prevention measures and follow doctor's recommendations pertaining to prescription medication for underlying health problems.

Signs and symptoms of heat related health effects

Annex 5 of the 2014 regional heat plan (www.santemontreal.qc.ca/chaleur) describes signs and symptoms of heat related health effects. These signs are sometimes hard to identify in certain people. If in doubt, do not hesitate to call Info-Santé at 811.

ANNEX 5 of the 2014 Regional Heat Plan.

Algorithm on heat related health effects for mental health care providers.

The following tool is a complement to health care worker's judgment, but does not replace it. The list of signs and symptoms is not exhaustive and other signs could be present in an individual. Furthermore, interventions to be undertaken can vary as a function of the severity of the factors present in one person.

- fever ≥ 40 °C (oral)
- confusion
- delirium, hallucinations
- difficulty to breath
- arrhythmia
- red, dry skin

YES



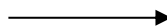
Call 911

Follow the recommendations issued by 911

↓ NO

- fever < 40 °C (oral)
- Dizziness
- great fatigue
- Rapid breathing when at rest
- hypotension
- Increase in cardiac frequency
- Red skin, transpiration
- Nausea

YES



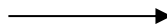
Call 811 immediatly

It is urgent to apply preventive measures and seek an air conditioned environment

↓ NO

- discomfort due to heat
- red skin, transpiration

YES



Apply preventive measures

If in doubt, call 811

↓ NO

Maintain at all time the suggested preventive measures in order to avoid heat related health effects

- Drink water
- Visit a cool or air conditioned place
- Take many showers a day to cool down
- Avoid strenuous exercise

Who to contact for more information

If you have any questions concerning heat related health effects, contact Karine Price (kprice@santepub-mtl.qc.ca) or Stéphane Perron (sperron@santepub-mtl.qc.ca) at Direction de santé publique de l'Agence de la santé et des services sociaux de Montréal (DSP).

Additional information is available for mental health care providers or health professionals on the DSP's Web site at www.dsp.santemontreal.qc.ca/chaleur.

People with mental health problems can obtain more information on the Agence's Santé Montréal Portal at www.santemontreal.qc.ca/en/heat.