

Heat and Health

When it's very hot, some people are at greater risk of developing heat-related health problems. Older people, young children, people with heart or lung disease, and people with mental health problems can be affected more than the rest of the population. Their health can deteriorate quickly when it's very hot.

Why are people with mental health problems at greater risk?

People with mental health problems are at greater risk for several reasons:

- They can have trouble sensing heat even when it's very hot.
- They can dress too warmly.
- They can have trouble perceiving thirst and may not drink enough fluids when it's hot.
- Some are alone. They don't have access to help when they need it or to advice from someone who can tell them how to protect themselves from the heat.
- Many don't have air conditioning at home. They might hesitate going to air conditioned places like shopping malls during very hot days.
- They can also have other health problems that make them more vulnerable to heat, like diabetes, obesity and heart or lung diseases.

What health problems are linked to heat?

The main health problems linked to heat are the following:

- Dehydration
- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Confusion
- Fainting

If these symptoms are present, call Info-Santé at 8-1-1 or talk to a health professional. **If you have fever in addition to these symptoms**, you may have heatstroke, which is a medical emergency. In this case, **call 9-1-1 to get help**. In general, when it's very hot, be vigilant. In summer 2010, the heat wave that affected Montreal caused about 100 deaths, 30 of which were people with mental health problems.

How to prevent heat-related illness

When it's hot, people with mental health problems should do the following:

- **Spend at least 2 hours a day in an air-conditioned or cool place.** Stay longer if you feel the need to. If there is no air-conditioned room in the house, don't hesitate to go to a public place that is air-conditioned like a shopping mall or a library.

- **Drink a lot of water even before you feel thirsty or follow the recommendations of your doctor.** 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
- **Take at least one cool shower or bath a day, or wet your skin with a damp towel to cool off.** This helps lower body temperature and stay cool.
- **Wear light clothing.** Wearing light clothing that lets air through will also let heat escape.

Situations at higher risk

- The first few very hot days of summer, because the body isn't used to heat yet.
- When it's very hot for several days and nights.
- When it's very humid and there's no wind.
- If you live in an urban heat island or downtown, because the heat can be more intense. An urban heat island can form when there are no trees or vegetation, many asphalted surfaces and no air circulation because of building density. Temperatures in these zones can be higher than in parks, for example.
- When you can't go to an air-conditioned place.

For more information

If you have **questions or in case of heat-related illness**, call Info-Santé at **8-1-1**. You can also talk to a health professional such as a doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

In case of **emergency**, always call **9-1-1**.

To see the pamphlet on prevention of heat-related health problems, go to **“There is a heat wave!”**

You can also contact your CSSS for copies of this document.