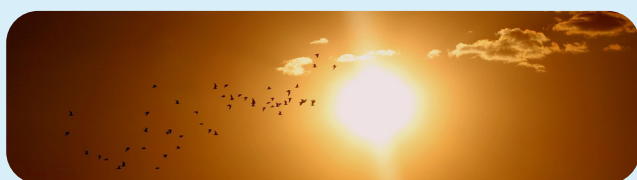


HEAT, WILDFIRE SMOKE, AND HEALTH

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS FOR OWNERS AND MANAGERS OF RENTAL AND STRATA HOUSING

Extreme heat and wildfire smoke events can put housing residents at risk for illness or death, even when they are at home in their units. Owners and managers of rental and strata housing can make potentially lifesaving decisions that protect housing residents.



Heat and health

Heat events can cause heat-related illnesses such as heat exhaustion and **heat stroke**, and can worsen pre-existing health conditions such as heart disease. This can lead to severe illness or death. **As the climate warms, heat events will become more common.**

Hundreds of people died during the 2021 BC heat dome, and most who died lived alone in the community. People who live in buildings without air conditioning are at higher risk because heat can increase indoors day after day during heat events. Indoor temperatures of **31°C or higher are especially dangerous**, and temperatures **over 26°C can be harmful** for people who are more susceptible. Indoor temperatures can also remain high late into the evening and for days after a heat event, even when temperatures have dropped outside. It may also be difficult for people to find other cool places to stay.

People who are **elderly** are at more risk because they are less physically able to control their body temperature and may not notice thirst or high body temperature as easily. Certain medications can also make it harder for the body to regulate heat. Similarly, people with mental health concerns, including schizophrenia, are at higher risk. Risk is heightened for those who lack social connections and support, with no one around to check on them.

Barriers to staying cool

Owners and managers of rental housing or stratas sometimes enforce policies about residents installing and using air conditioning or using other cooling measures, such as window covers or awnings. **These barriers can put people's health at risk.**



Health Authority recommendations for heat

In advance of the summer season, we recommend owners and managers of rental and/or strata housing **consider reducing any barriers that would prevent residents from keeping cool.**

- » Check if strata bylaws or rental agreements prohibit cooling measures, and if they exist, encourage the strata council or building management to change them. Advertise any changes to housing residents.
- » Learn about [changes to the Rental Tenancy Act](#) which states that not allowing air conditioning units could be considered **unconscionable** if it impacts tenant health. Allow air conditioning, where possible. Newer models are usually low wattage, reducing cost and power load.
- » **Share information and posters** on how to stay healthy during the heat. Materials are available on the Regional Health Authority websites listed below.
- » Encourage residents to **check on potentially isolated neighbours**. Resources on how to complete a supportive [heat wellness check](#) can be found on the Regional Health Authority websites listed below.

HEAT, WILDFIRE SMOKE AND HEALTH

Health Authorities encourage owners and managers of buildings to:

- » During heat events, **open a cool, air-conditioned common room for residents**. For people at risk from heat, even walking or rolling a few blocks may worsen health conditions so cooling spaces at home may be the only option for these residents to cool down. If this is not possible, encourage the use of nearby cool outdoor green spaces or cooling centres.
- » Share information about **nearby cooling centres and spaces**. Local government websites and social media accounts often have lists or maps of these cooling resources.
- » Explore [BetterHomesBC](#) and other retrofitting programs for long-term energy savings and health benefits for your residents.

Risk of falls from windows

Dangerous falls can occur during hot weather when windows are used to cool homes. From 2016 to 2020, trauma centres across BC admitted 81 children after falls from windows or balconies. Building owners and managers can help prevent these injuries by installing window guards or window stops, and/or permitting housing residents to do so.

Air quality events and health

Wildfire smoke events are becoming more frequent and severe as the climate changes, resulting in more days with poor air quality that can impact health.

Wildfire smoke contains tiny particles of pollution (PM2.5) that can travel into your lungs and blood stream. This can have **both short-term and longer-lasting health impacts**, especially for people at higher risk, including pregnant people, infants, children, people with medical conditions, and older adults.

Providing filtered air inside all buildings is the best way to protect health during wildfire smoke events. Building owners and managers can help protect housing residents preparing the building for air quality events.

Health Authority recommendations for air quality

Owners and managers of rental and/or strata housing are encouraged to:

- » Conduct **regular maintenance** of HVAC systems.
- » Have a **smoke readiness plan based on ASHRAE 44 guidance**. If your building has a mechanical ventilation (HVAC) system, your smoke readiness plan may include actions to reduce outdoor air intake and upgrade air filters to the highest rating possible, ideally minimum MERV 13. Make sure these changes do not reduce building pressure.
- » Consider creating a **temporary cleaner air space** in the building where residents can spend time in filtered air. Add **portable HEPA filter air cleaners** or **do-it-yourself (DIY) air cleaners** to a common space. Refer to the [Health Canada Guidance on Cleaner Air Spaces](#).
- » **Subscribe to air quality advisories and alerts** for your region ([Metro Vancouver](#) or [British Columbia](#)).
- » During smoke events, share/ post **resources on the health impacts** of smoke and how to access the **Air Quality Health Index (AQHI)** nearest to you, in multiple languages if possible. People living outside of urban centres may find more accurate local air quality data on [AQMap.ca](#)



We are here to help

For more information to share with your residents and partners, please see fraserhealth.ca/heatsafety or fraserhealth.ca/airquality or vch.ca/climatechange.

For more guidance, please contact healthybuiltenvironment@fraserhealth.ca or healthy.environments@vch.ca