

Heat, Smoke and Health

This summer, communities in VCH can expect episodes of extreme hot weather and wildfire smoke. Everyone is at risk of heat and smoke related illness, but nearly one third of our community is at high risk due to age or comorbidities.

Health Effects of Heat:

Heat causes a spectrum of illness from discomfort and thirst to heat stroke and death. Those most vulnerable include young children, the elderly, people who are housebound in un-air-conditioned homes, those working or exercising in the heat, homeless individuals, and people with chronic heart and lung conditions, mental illness or substance use disorder. Certain drugs impair our bodies' ability to respond to heat, including diuretics, beta blockers, and the "anti's" such as: anti-hypertensives, anti-depressants, anti-psychotics, anti-cholinergics, anti-histamines, and anti-parkinsonian medications.

Health Effects of Wildfire Smoke:

Wildfire smoke is a respiratory irritant with short and long-term health effects in everyone. Short term exposure to high levels of wildfire smoke can lead to acute exacerbations of respiratory or cardiac disease. Those particularly vulnerable include infants, the elderly, and those with diabetes, heart or lung disease. There is some evidence that long term exposure to wildfire smoke (weeks) during pregnancy could result in lower birth weights for infants.

Recommendations for Patient Care:

The best way to prevent health impacts when advisories have been issued is to reduce exposure to heat and wildfire smoke. This means spending time in indoor spaces with adequately filtered and cooled air. Advise patients to:

- Look out for heat and air quality advisories
- Stay hydrated and pay attention to their symptoms
- Reduce or postpone strenuous outdoor activity.

Create summer management plans with your patients who belong to one or more of the vulnerable populations identified above. This should include strategies to reduce exposure to heat and smoke along with prescriptions for rescue medications. As well, advise family members to check on vulnerable patients, particularly the frail elderly and the mentally ill, when advisories are in place.

Follow the links below for additional information and resources:

www.vch.ca/heat for heat, and
www.vch.ca/wildfiresmoke for wildfire smoke

Canada's New Food Guide

The new Canada's Food Guide, is an evidence-based resource which promotes healthy food choices. It encourages Canadians to cook more often, enjoy their food by trying new foods and eating with friends and family, and to be aware of food marketing. The new guide aligns with VCH's Healthy Plate strategy in promoting at least half your plate to be vegetables, and for water to be your drink of choice. Please make your patients aware of the new Food Guide and encourage them to visit the website for healthy recipes, tips, and other resources: <https://food-guide.canada.ca/>

You can reach a Medical Health Officer in Vancouver at 604.675.3900 Toll free at 1.855.675.3900
For public health emergencies after hours contact the Medical Health Officer on call at 604.527.4893

Vancouver Medical Health Officers
Dr. Patricia Daly (Chief Medical Health Officer)
Dr. Réka Gustafson, Dr. John Harding, Dr. James Lu, Dr. Althea Hayden

To receive Physicians' Updates by email please contact us at: vchregistrationcdc@vch.ca