



Consumer Version Extreme Heat Response Plan

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This *Extreme Heat Response Plan* (the *Plan*) is an internal product of the Public Health Services department, in the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency. It is to be viewed and used only by relevant stakeholders and partners identified in the *Plan*.

This *Plan* was developed by Public Health Services under the General Management System of the County of San Diego, and in support of *Live Well San Diego*.

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Section I – Overview

Exposure to extreme heat can cause illness, injury, and death. Heat-related illnesses could include heat rash, sunburn, heat cramps, heat exhaustion, heat stroke, and even death. A vulnerable individual may experience heat-related illness or fatality at any time when temperatures are high, but the overall effect of prolonged periods of heat (i.e., heat wave) increases the risk of illness and death in the population.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) identifies Extreme Heat Events (previously called Excessive heat Events) as one of the leading causes of weather-related deaths and estimates an average of 618 people in the United States are killed by extreme heat every year. Those at greatest risk for developing a heat-related injury are individuals who are working or playing outdoors, without access to air conditioning, socially isolated, or on certain medications. Vulnerable populations include children, low-income individuals, pregnant women, older adults, and individuals with mental or chronic conditions.

With the increasing trend in extreme temperatures occurring across the country, preparing for more extreme heat conditions in San Diego County is prudent. Since 2013, the region has seen increasing temperatures, evidenced by increased extreme heat alerts and warnings. July of 2023 set the record for being the hottest month ever recorded. With increasing temperatures due to climate change, even in the coastal areas, it will be vital to adequately prepare for extreme temperatures. By definition, from the National Weather Services, the coastal region is roughly 10 miles inland from the ocean/bay shorelines, followed by the inland, mountain, and desert temperature zones.

Historically, in September 1963, the temperature reached 111°F at the airport along the coast. There have been at least four other years where the temperature went above 106°F in the coastal region.¹ In anticipation for additional events of this nature, this plan describes additional resources to support San Diego County residents, if extreme coastal temperatures occur.

¹<https://www.weather.gov/media/sgx/documents/weatherhistory.pdf>; Last updated March 2025

Increases in extreme heat events are due to the continuous warming of the Earth. Rising temperatures and changing climates increase the need to establish response plans for heat emergencies. In efforts to limit the adverse health effects from extreme heat, this *Extreme Heat Response Plan* (the *Plan*) contains definitions and established guidelines for how the County of San Diego will respond to events of extreme heat.

A. Extreme Heat Mitigation Strategies

Key strategies to address mitigation of extreme temperature events include Cool Zones, or locations where individuals can take respite from the heat; and transportation support for those individuals without a home air conditioner, or the resources to run their air conditioners for prolonged periods of time.

1. Cool Zones

In the summer, the County designates [Cool Zone sites](#), air-conditioned settings where seniors and others can gather. The sites, mostly located in the hottest areas of the county, encourage people to share air conditioning during the heat of the day, lowering individual usage and helping to conserve energy for the whole community. Residents can use officially sanctioned Cool Zones to escape the heat and rest up before going back outside.

B. Keeping Cool During a Pandemic

To keep yourself safe, while being in a Cool Zone, all individuals should remember the basic precautions to protect yourself from illness:

1. Maintain Good Hygiene

Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially after you have been in a public place, or after blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.

2. Stay Current on All Recommended Vaccinations

Regardless of age, regularly consult with your medical provider on appropriate vaccinations, including flu and COVID-19, as well as booster vaccinations.

3. Mask and Social Distance If You Have Medical Concerns

If you are at greater risk for medical complications or are otherwise concerned about becoming sick, take additional precautions, even if your vaccinations are current:

- Wear a good-quality, well-fitting mask around others, particularly in indoor public settings and/or where multiple people are present.
- Attempt to socially distance where possible from others not in your household to reduce exposure risk.

Section II – Extreme Heat Events




A. General Roles and Responsibilities

If an extreme heat emergency occurs, the Public Health Services (PHS) branch, of the County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA), is responsible for coordinating response efforts between other County departments and external partners, and in offering necessary support services. Additional County responsibilities are to:

- Finalize Cool Zone list by spring of each year.
- Review information from National Weather Service (NWS).
- Determine local activation levels according to local weather conditions, changes in the climate, and the *Extreme Heat Response Plan*.
- Communicate & coordinate next steps with community partners.
- Communicate necessary actions that community members should take.
- Provide a transportation resource to Cool Zones for all individuals that are impacted.

B. Plan Activation

During extreme heat events, PHS will act and communicate with stakeholders to determine the appropriate activities. Three (3) phases of activation are recognized:

-  Phase I. Seasonal Readiness
-  Phase II. Heat Alert
-  Phase III. Heat Emergency



Different climates exist among the various temperature zones in the County. However, extreme heat often occurs from May 1 to October 31, or later, each year. However, in recent years, extreme heat can occur year-round. The *Extreme Heat Response Plan (the Plan)* may also be activated for various unusual heat events throughout the year, due to seasonal and extreme heat forecasts in any or all geographic areas of San Diego County. This forecast provides time for the County to prepare for a heat response. Utilizing the *Plan*, the severity of an extreme heat event is determined. Designated PHS staff members work with County and community partners to take action in response to the extreme heat conditions.

Section III – Communications

A. Notification and Warning

Timely warnings of emerging extreme heat conditions are essential to preserving the safety of county residents as well as establishing a coordinated and effective response. Upon receiving information that an extreme heat event is approaching, PHS will initiate the appropriate activation procedures. County actions are activated by the NWS issuing heat alert products that indicate a period of hot weather that is likely to produce significant health risk to the population. The level of *the Plan* activation is influenced by the threat level forecasted by the NWS.

B. Emergency Public Information

The County Communications Office will coordinate with responding agencies to provide the public with information on the current heat emergency, including information on [Cool Zones](#) and other services available to the public. Public information will also be shared on different County departmental websites, social media and news outlets, mobile applications, and other communication platforms.



Section IV – Definitions & Resources

A. Definitions

Cool Zones: Designated air-conditioned sites throughout the county for vulnerable populations to gather at to keep cool and save energy costs.

Excessive Heat Response Plan Work Group: The Work Group is responsible for meeting annually to discuss past extreme heat events, review plans for the upcoming year's extreme heat response efforts, and to review the *Plan*.

Excessive Heat Response Plan Task Force: The Task Force is responsible for meeting each time the *Plan* is activated to discuss actions being taken. The group reviews the *Plan* annually. Every two (2) years the Task Force conducts an in-depth review of the *Plan* for renewal signature.

Heat Alert: Phase II within the *Plan*, indicating a period of hot weather that is risky, but not to the extent of causing injury/illness.

Heat Emergency: Phase III within the *Excessive Heat Response Plan*, indicating a period of extreme heat that is likely to cause heat illness/injury to individuals who are not prepared.

Heat Event: An event designated as a heat advisory, extreme heat watch, or extreme heat warning that lasts for one or more consecutive days.

Heat Wave: A period of irregular and uncomfortably hot and humid weather. Heat waves can last two or more days.

Heat Advisory: Above average daily high temperatures and/or minimum temperatures are expected within the next 1 to 3 days, but not extreme. Temperatures may be near record levels but usually not record-breaking. The impacts from heat are likely to be on the sensitive or unprepared groups that do not take necessary precautions in affected zones.

Excessive Heat Watch: There is the potential for a high impact extreme heat (extreme heat warning level) event within the next 5 days. Forecast daily high and/or low temperatures are much above seasonal averages (Heat Risk) in at least one zone. The watch may be followed by an extreme heat warning or the lesser heat advisory. The event could affect all populations and now is the time for advanced planning or actions to help reduce the impact in the affected zones. Ideally, a watch is followed by a warning for any zone to maximize lead time and urgency of preparedness.

Excessive Heat Warning: High impact heat event likely in the next 1 to 3 days and could impact all populations if precautions are not taken. Extreme daily high and/or low temperatures are expected or imminent and will be much above average compared to a 30-year climatology (anomalously warm) and possible record temperature. Action should be taken for the zones affected.

Extreme/Excessive Heat Event: A weather condition with extreme heat and/or humidity that could cause heat-related illnesses or fatalities.

National Weather Service: A federal agency that provides weather, water, and climate data. Gives warnings to hazardous weather conditions for purposes of preparedness, protection, and safety.

B. Resources

1. LOCAL

- Cool Zones
 - <https://www.Coolzones.org/>
 - San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E)
 - Bill Payment Assistance and Customer Service:
 - <https://www.sdge.com/residential/pay-bill/get-payment-bill-assistance/health-senior-support/time-sensitive-program>
 - <https://www.sdge.com/residential/customer-service/contact-us>
 - Gas Emergencies: 1-800-411-7343
 - Electrical Emergencies: 1-800-611-7343
2. STATE
- Transportation Resources
 - <https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa/programs/ais/C/OVID-19-Community-Resources/Transportation.html>
3. FEDERAL
- FEMA: Be Prepared for Extreme Heat:
 - [BE PREPARED FOR EXTREME HEAT](#) [BE PREPARED FOR EXTREME HEAT](#)
 - National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
 - NWS Experimental heat Risk: Identifying Potential Heat Risks in the Seven Day Forecast:
 - [NWS HeatRisk](#)
 - Ready.Gov: Extreme Heat Information:
 - <https://www.ready.gov/heat>
 - National Weather Service (NWS)
 - <https://www.weather.gov/>

Section V – Authorities and References

A. Authorities

1. The authority to proclaim a local emergency for an extreme heat event, if needed, is provided by the following state statutes:
 - The Government Code Section (within the Emergency Services Act, Chapter 7, Division 1, Title 2): a. §8630, b. §8558, and c. §8625;
 - Health and Safety Code Section: a. §101040; and
 - Penal Code Section §409.5.
2. The reference for this *Plan* is the Governor’s *Office of Emergency Services Contingency Plan for Heat Emergencies*.

B. References

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – Climate Change and Extreme Heat Events. Retrieved from: https://www.cdc.gov/climate-health/?CDC_AAref_Val=https://www.cdc.gov/climateandhealth/pubs/ClimateChangeandExtremeHeatEvents.pdf
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – About Extreme Heat. Retrieved from: https://www.cdc.gov/heat-health/about/index.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fextreme-heat%2Fabout%2Findex.html
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – Warning Signs and Symptoms of heat-Related Illness. Retrieved from: https://www.cdc.gov/heat-health/about/index.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fextreme-heat%2Fsigns-symptoms%2Findex.html

Section VI – Heat Safety Tips

Stay **Cool**



Stay **Hydrated**



Stay **Informed**



Stay Cool

- **Wear** lightweight, light-colored, loose-fitting clothing.
- **Stay** cool indoors.
- **Check** out San Diego Cool Zone locations.
- **Limit** outdoor activities:
 - If exertion in the heat makes your heart pound and leaves you gasping for breath, **STOP** all activity.
 - Wear “broad spectrum” sunscreen (SPF 15 or higher).
- **Do not leave infants, children, elderly, or pets in cars.**



Stay Hydrated

- **Drink** plenty of fluids
 - Don't wait until you're thirsty to drink.
- **Stay away from very sugary or alcoholic drinks.**
 - Also avoid very cold drinks because they can cause stomach cramps.
- **Replace salt and minerals:**
 - Heavy sweating removes salt and minerals from the body that need to be replaced. A sports drink can replace the salt and minerals you lose in sweat. If you are on a low-salt diet, have diabetes, high blood pressure, or other chronic conditions, talk with your doctor before drinking a sports beverage or taking salt tablets.
- **Keep your pets hydrated:**
 - Provide plenty of fresh water for your pets and leave the water in a shady area.



Stay Informed

- **Check** local news updates.
- **Know the signs:**
 - Learn the signs and [symptoms of heat-related illnesses](#) and how to treat them.
- **Monitor individuals at high risk:**
 - Anyone can suffer from heat-related illness, but some people are at greater risk than others. These people include:
 - Infants and children, the elderly, and those with weight challenges.
 - Those who are ill with conditions such as heart disease, high blood pressure.
 - People who take certain medications, such as for depression, insomnia, or poor circulation.
- Watch out for your at-risk neighbors! Know the signs of heat exhaustion and heat stroke.