Consumer Version
Excessive Heat Response Plan

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This *Excessive 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*. 
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section I – Overview .................................................................................................................. 5

A. Excessive Heat Mitigation Strategies.................................................................................. 6
   1. Cool Zones ..................................................................................................................... 6
   2. Cool Zone Fan Program ............................................................................................... 6
   3. Transportation .............................................................................................................. 6

B. Keeping Cool During a COVID-19 Pandemic ................................................................. 7
   1. Wear a Mask .................................................................................................................. 7
   2. Stay 6 feet Away from Others ................................................................................... 7
   3. Wash Your Hands Often ............................................................................................. 7
   4. Get Vaccinated ............................................................................................................ 7

Section II – Extreme Heat Events .......................................................................................... 8

A. General Roles and Responsibilities ................................................................................. 8

B. Plan Activation ................................................................................................................. 8

Section III – Communications .................................................................................................. 9

A. Notification and Warning ............................................................................................... 9

B. Emergency Public Information ....................................................................................... 9

Section IV – Definitions & Resources .................................................................................... 9

A. Definitions ....................................................................................................................... 9

B. Resources ....................................................................................................................... 11

Section V – Authorities and References ............................................................................... 13

Section VI – Heat Safety Tips ............................................................................................... 14
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Section I – Overview

Exposure to excessive 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 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 excessive temperatures occurring across the country, preparing for more extreme heat conditions in San Diego County is prudent. During the past 15 years, the region has seen increasing temperatures, evidenced by increased excessive heat alerts and warnings. With increasing temperatures due to climate change, even in the coastal areas, it will be vital to adequately prepare for excessive temperatures. By definition, from the National Weather Services, the coastal regional 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 anticipation for additional events of this nature, this plan describes additional resources to support San Diego County residents, if excessive coastal temperatures occur.

Increases in excessive 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 excessive heat, this document contains definitions and established guidelines for how the County of San Diego will respond to events of excessive heat.

A. Excessive Heat Mitigation Strategies

Key strategies to address mitigation of excessive temperature events include Cool Zones, or locations where individuals can take respite from the heat; the Cool Zones Fan Program, supported by San Diego Gas and Electric; 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.

2. Cool Zones Fan Program

Even with some Cool Zone sites opening, not all seniors or persons with disabilities can leave home to escape the heat. Homebound individuals, those lacking transportation, and those who decide to stay home due to the risk of COVID-19, may not be able to take advantage of traditional Cool Zone sites. To help these community members beat the heat, the County of San Diego, in partnership with SDG&E, provides free electric fans to those who are living on limited incomes. To be eligible, a resident must not have access to an air-conditioned space at their home or apartment building.

3. Transportation

During an excessive heat event 2-1-1 San Diego will maintain a list of available transportation resources that will transport County residents to and from Cool Zone locations. This is coordinated through various partners. There is no charge for participation in this program.
B. Keeping Cool During a COVID-19 Pandemic

To keep yourself safe while being in a Cool Zone, all individuals should remember the basic precautions to protect yourself. These are the CDC three (3) “w’s”: wash your hands, watch your distance, and wear a mask, as well as get vaccinated.

1. Wash Your Hands Often

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 6 Feet Away from Others

Put 6 feet of distance between yourself and people who don’t live in your household. Remember that some people without symptoms may be able to spread virus.

3. Wear a Mask

People who have a condition or are taking medications that weaken their immune system may NOT be protected even if they are fully vaccinated. They should continue to take all precautions recommended for unvaccinated people, including wearing a well-fitted non-valve mask over their nose and mouth and continue to do so until advised otherwise by their healthcare provider. Follow guidance from the CDC and California Department of Public Health (CDPH) on mask wearing.

4. Get Vaccinated

Authorized COVID-19 vaccines can help protect you from COVID-19. Getting vaccinated prevents severe illness, hospitalizations, and death. Unvaccinated people should get vaccinated and continue masking until they are fully vaccinated.
Section II – Extreme Heat Events

A. General Roles and Responsibilities

If an excessive 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 PHS responsibilities are to:

- Review information from National Weather Service (NWS)
- Determine local activation levels according to local weather conditions, changes in the climate, and the *Excessive Heat Response Plan*.
- Communicate & coordinate next steps with community partners.
- Finalize Cool Zone list by March 31st of each year.
- Provide a transportation resource to Cool Zones for all residents 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, excessive heat often occurs from May 1 to September 30, or later, each year. However, in recent years, excessive heat can occur outside this period. The *Plan* may also be activated for various unusual heat events throughout the year due to seasonal and excessive 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. The County Public Health Officer would determine the severity of an excessive heat
event based on the threat to public health and safety. Designated 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 excessive 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 excessive 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 Excessive Heat Response Plan (the Plan) activation is influenced by the threat level forecast 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, 2-1-1 San Diego, and others.

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. For those individuals who may need assistance in getting to a Cool Zone, transportation options will be made available at no cost.
**Excessive Heat Response Plan Work Group**: The Work Group is responsible for meeting annually to discuss past excessive heat events, review plans for the upcoming year’s excessive 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 *Excessive Heat Response 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 hotness that is likely to cause heat illness/injury to individuals who are not prepared.

**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 excessive heat (excessive 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 excessive 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. 2-1-1 San Diego:
   - [https://211sandiego.org/health-wellness/cool-zones/](https://211sandiego.org/health-wellness/cool-zones/)

2. Cool Zones Location Listings:
   - [Coolzones.org/](https://Coolzones.org/)

3. FEMA: Be Prepared for Extreme Heat:
   - [https://community.fema.gov/ProtectiveActions/s/article/Extreme-Heat](https://community.fema.gov/ProtectiveActions/s/article/Extreme-Heat)

4. Information for Transportation Options:

5. National Weather Service (NWS):
   - [https://www.weather.gov/](https://www.weather.gov/)

   - [https://www.wrnoaa.gov/wrh/heatrisk/?wfo=sgx](https://www.wrnoaa.gov/wrh/heatrisk/?wfo=sgx)
7. Ready.Gov: Extreme Heat Information:
   • https://www.ready.gov/heat

8. 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
Section V – Authorities and References

A. Authorities

1. The authority to proclaim a local emergency for an excessive 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/climateandhealth/pubs/ClimateChangeandExtremeHeatEvents.pdf

2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – About Extreme Heat. Retrieved from
   https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/heat_guide.html

   https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/extremeheat/warning.html
Section VI – Heat Safety Tips

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.