

HEATWAVE SAFETY

FOR EXPECTANT AND NEW MOTHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA



South Africa is increasingly experiencing extreme heat and heatwaves, especially during spring and summer months.

High temperatures aren't just uncomfortable — they can pose real health risks to pregnant women and new mothers, including dehydration, heat exhaustion, and impacts on pregnancy outcomes like preterm birth or low birth weight.

Pregnancy makes it harder for your body to cool down and increases your risk of heat-related illness compared with people who are not pregnant. This is why simple, proactive steps can make a big difference.

Why Heat Matters During Pregnancy

When the temperature increases:

- Your body works harder to cool both you and your baby, increasing sweating and fluid loss.
- Dehydration can reduce amniotic fluid and raise the risk of preterm labour.
- Heat can contribute to heat exhaustion or heatstroke, even life-threatening if untreated.
- Hot weather can make comfortable sleep harder and contribute to stress or fatigue.

Top Heat Safety Tips for Pregnant and New Mothers

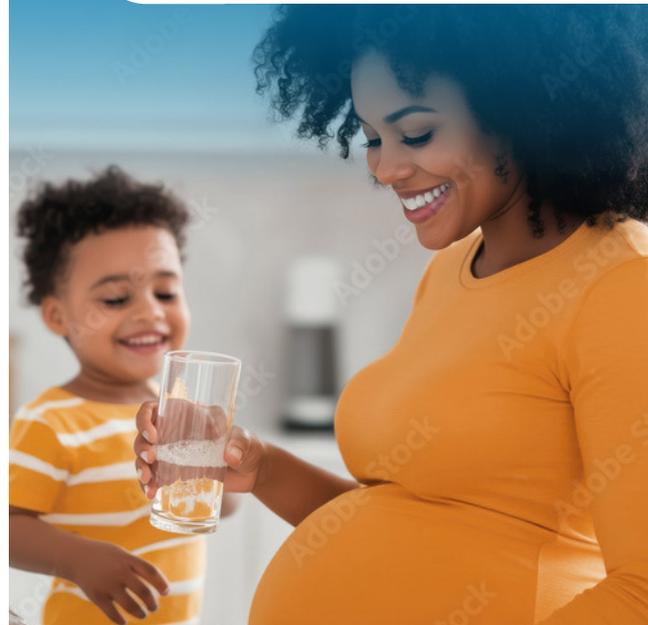
 Stay cool and hydrated

 Plan activities around cooler times

 Make your space heat-friendly

 Monitor your health

 Wear light, comfortable clothing



Top Heat Safety Tips for Pregnant and New Mothers



Stay Cool and Hydrated

Drink fluids regularly — don't wait until you're thirsty. Aim for frequent sips throughout the day. Water is best; you can also include hydrating drinks like electrolyte solutions if needed.

Eat water-rich fruits and vegetables like watermelon, cucumber, grapes or oranges.



Plan Activities Around Cooler Times

Avoid being outside during the hottest parts of the day — typically 10 am to 4 pm.

If you need to go out, take an umbrella, a wide-brimmed hat and a portable water bottle.



Make Your Space Heat-Friendly

Keep windows shaded with curtains or blinds.

Use fans if available; if not, open windows early in the morning and evening to improve airflow.

Rest in the coolest part of your home.



Monitor Your Health

Pay attention to symptoms like dizziness, headache, nausea, or heavy sweating. These can be early signs of heat exhaustion.

Contact your healthcare provider if you notice marked swelling, headache that doesn't go away, or signs of dehydration.

Simple Routine Checklist

- ✓ Drink water regularly throughout the day
- ✓ Rest indoors during peak heat
- ✓ Use shade and cooling habits (wet cloths, fans)
- ✓ Eat hydrating foods e.g. watermelon, cucumber, etc.
- ✓ Keep track of how you're feeling and baby's movements
- ✓ Contact a provider if symptoms worsen

Wear Light, Comfortable Clothing



Choose loose, light-coloured clothing made from breathable fabrics such as cotton.

Avoid dark, tight clothing that traps heat.

For New Mothers



Keep breastfeeding in a cool, shaded area and continue to hydrate well — this supports milk production and your own health.

Feed your baby in a cool, shaded place.

Keep babies lightly dressed and not wrapped in thick blankets.

Never leave babies in parked cars or hot rooms.

Heatwaves and Healthcare Visits



Try to schedule antenatal visits in the cooler morning hours when possible.

If you must travel during hot weather, take extra water, and rest in the shade.

Special Considerations



Pregnant women, especially those with other health conditions (like hypertension or diabetes), may be at higher risk during heatwaves. Always follow up with your healthcare provider if you have concerns.

Community and Family Support

Family, neighbours and community health workers can help by:

- Checking in on pregnant and new mothers during hot weather
- Helping with errands to reduce time spent outside in heat
- Encouraging hydration and cool rest periods

Heatwaves are a growing reality in South Africa's climate. But with awareness, simple precautions, and support, you can protect both yourself and your baby from heat-related harms. Always prioritise hydration, rest, and early care if you feel unwell.