

STAY SAFE IN EXTREME HEAT

INFORMATION FOR PEOPLE WITH PHYSICAL AND MENTAL CHALLENGES

Heatwaves are becoming more frequent in South Africa.



Very hot weather can be especially dangerous for people living with physical disabilities, chronic illnesses, or mental health conditions. Some conditions and medications make it harder for the body to cool down or recognise heat stress. Planning ahead and taking simple steps can prevent serious illness and save lives.

Why Heatwaves are More Dangerous

Extreme heat can:

- Interfere with the body's ability to regulate temperature
- Increase side effects of some medications
- Cause dehydration more quickly
- Worsen physical symptoms, fatigue, anxiety, or confusion
- Increase the risk of heat exhaustion or heat stroke.

People who may be at higher risk include:

- People with mobility limitations or chronic conditions
- People using power-dependent medical equipment
- People with anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, or other mental health conditions
- People who rely on caregivers or support services.

How to Protect Yourself During Heatwaves



Stay hydrated



Stay Cool



Limit Heat Exposure



Dress for the heat



Warning Signs

GET HELP URGENTLY IF YOU NOTICE:

Heat Exhaustion:

Heavy sweating, weakness or tiredness, headache, dizziness, nausea or vomiting.

Heat Stroke:

Very high body temperature, confusion or unusual behaviour, slurred speech, loss of consciousness (passed out) or hot, dry skin or no sweating.

Go to the nearest clinic or hospital immediately, or call emergency services.



How to Protect Yourself During Heatwaves



Stay Hydrated

Drink water regularly, even if you are not thirsty

Avoid alcohol, sugary drinks, and excess caffeine

Sip water throughout the day rather than all at once

If you are on a fluid-restricted diet, ask your doctor how much you should drink during hot weather



Stay Cool

Stay in an air-conditioned space if possible

If your home is hot, spend time in cool public places such as libraries, clinics, or shopping centres

Use a damp cloth on your neck, wrists, armpits, or forehead

Wet hands and feet



Limit Heat Exposure

Avoid strenuous activity during the hottest hours (10:00–16:00)

Plan outings for early morning or late afternoon

Rest often and move slowly



Dress for the Heat

Wear loose-fitting, light-coloured clothing

Choose breathable fabrics like cotton

Wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunscreen if outdoors

For people with physical challenges

Speak to Your Healthcare Provider

Ask how your condition or medications may be affected by heat

Some medicines reduce sweating or increase heat sensitivity

Plan for Medical Equipment

Have a backup power plan if you rely on oxygen, CPAP machines, or power wheelchairs

Prepare an emergency kit with chargers, batteries, medication, and contact numbers

Protect Mobility Aids

Park mobility scooters and wheelchairs in the shade

Before using a device that has been in the sun, touch metal to check for high heat

Check Accessibility

Ensure cooling centres, clinics, or shelters are physically accessible

Confirm accessible toilets and seating before travelling

For people with mental health challenges

Prioritise Rest and Routine

Heat can disrupt sleep and daily routines

Keep blinds closed during the day and open windows at night ensuring that it is safe

Try to maintain regular meals and sleep times

Be Aware of Medication Effects

Some mental health medications can affect sweating or temperature control

Drink enough fluids to replace sweat

Discuss concerns with your doctor or pharmacist

Stay Connected

Heat can increase stress, irritability, and anxiety

Stay in contact with family, friends, caregivers, or mental health professionals

Ask someone to check in on you during very hot days

Communicate Your Needs

Let caregivers or companions know how heat affects you

Ask for adjustments such as rest breaks, shade, or cooling support

How caregivers and families can help

- Check in regularly during heatwaves
- Encourage drinking water
- Help reduce time spent outdoors
- Watch for warning signs of heat illness
- Assist with transport to cool, safe places

Daily heat safety checklist

- ✓ Drink water often
- ✓ Stay in cool places
- ✓ Avoid midday heat
- ✓ Wear light clothing
- ✓ Check equipment and medication
- ✓ Ask for help early

Remember

Heatwaves can be dangerous, especially for people with physical or mental challenges, but many risks are preventable. Early action, planning, and support can protect health and save lives.