

# City of Toronto Heat Relief Strategy

May 2024

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# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.1 General

The City of Toronto Heat Relief Strategy is the City of Toronto's protocol for hot weather response. The heat season begins on May 15 and ends on September 30 each year, although there may be occasions where periods of heat fall outside of this range. Since 2000, the Hot Weather Response Coordinating Committee has developed, monitored and continuously improved Toronto's response to hot weather. Committee members consist of City divisions, agencies and partner organizations who provide direct services as part of the City's Heat Relief Strategy.

The Heat Relief Strategy is a living document and is reviewed and updated on an annual basis. An electronic version of the plan is provided to Committee members in addition to being posted on the [City of Toronto website](#). It is the responsibility of each Committee member to ensure all those involved in the response are familiar with their current response activities.

In the event of a severe and prolonged heat event, additional actions may be implemented at a divisional or corporate level under the provisions of Toronto Public Health (TPH) and/or the [City's Emergency Plan](#).

## 1.2 Purpose

The 2024 Heat Relief Strategy outlines the hot weather response activities coordinated by the Hot Weather Response Coordinating Committee, with a focus on providing targeted relief for the most vulnerable populations who have the highest risk of negative health outcomes due to extreme heat.

## 1.3 Scope

The Heat Relief Strategy outlines the approach, roles and responsibilities of Hot Weather Response Coordinating Committee members in providing City-wide heat relief services as directed by Council. It does not include direction, guidance or responsibilities of individuals or other parties (e.g. private landlords, businesses, community agencies).

Circumstances in which a Heat Warning reaches a level of severity and/or duration that exceeds the capacity of heat relief services is referred to as a "Heat Emergency" and is outside the scope of the Heat Relief Strategy. More information on Heat Emergencies is detailed in [Section 2.4 Escalation to Heat Emergency](#)

## 1.4 Authority

Authority for implementing the Heat Relief Strategy is supported by a [2002 City Council directive](#) directing that “the Hot Weather Response Plan piloted in 2001 be implemented on an annual basis and the appropriate City officials be authorized and directed to take the necessary steps to give effect thereto”.

Coordination of the Heat Relief Strategy follows a [2019 City Council directive](#) to the City's Medical Officer of Health (MOH), the Deputy City Manager, Corporate Services (DCM - CS), and the Deputy City Manager, Infrastructure & Development Services (DCM - IDS) to collaborate on continued implementation of the City-wide Heat Relief Strategy, as well directing all City Divisions to continue to incorporate hot weather response activities as part of their divisional mandates.

## 2.0 About Heat

### 2.1 Health Impacts

Extreme heat is associated with a number of health impacts ranging from heat stress and heat stroke to more serious effects, such as cardiovascular-related disease and/or death. Everyone is vulnerable to the effects of extreme heat but certain groups of people are more at risk than others. These groups of people include:

- Older adults
- Infants and young children
- People with chronic illness (e.g. breathing problems, mental illness, and heart problems) or who are physically impaired
- Socially disadvantaged communities and individuals
  - Low income
  - Experiencing homelessness
  - Living alone
- People who work in the heat including outdoor workers
- People who are physically active outside

Toronto Public Health (TPH) and Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) estimate that heat contributes to an average of 120 premature deaths per year in the

city<sup>1</sup>. Based on [Toronto's Future Weather & Climate Driver Study](#), as Toronto experiences hotter days and longer heat episodes in the future, the impact of heat on health is expected to increase.

## 2.2 Heat Warning Definitions

Heat Warnings are issued by Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) when the following [conditions](#) are met for a given two-day period:

- Daytime high is forecast to be greater than or equal to 31°C; and
- Overnight low temperature is forecast to be greater than or equal to 20°C; or
- Humidex is forecast to be greater than or equal to 40

## 2.3 Heat Warning Monitoring

### 2.3.1 Heat Warning Monitoring Expectations

It is the responsibility of all Hot Weather Response Coordinating Committee members to monitor for Heat Warnings during the period of May 15 to September 30—either directly from the ECCC [website](#) or via automated email notification by signing up to [EC Alert Me](#) and creating an alert.

Once a Heat Warning is issued, Hot Weather Response Coordinating Committee members are expected to implement their required response actions per the roles and responsibilities section.

### 2.3.2 Monitoring Guidelines

- Every day between May 15 and September 30, participants will monitor for updates from ECCC declaring a Heat Warning
- ECCC will typically declare Heat Warnings **the afternoon before** the impacts of the heat event occur
- Heat Warnings remain in effect until ECCC issues its termination
- ECCC may terminate a Heat Warning at any time
- There may be instances when the weather changes rapidly and ECCC may declare a Heat Warning for impacts that may occur the same day. Same-day heat warnings are typically issued in the morning

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<sup>1</sup> Pengelly, L.D., Campbell, M.E., Cheng, C.S., Fu, C., Gingrich, S.E., Macfarlane, R. 2007. Anatomy of heat waves and mortality in Toronto. Lessons for public health protection. Canadian Journal of Public Health, 98(5), 364-368.

## 2.4 Escalation to Heat Emergency

A Heat Emergency may arise from an existing Heat Warning in which the severity and/or duration may strain the capacity of the health and social services sectors (including first responders) and/or has imminent/anticipated impacts on critical infrastructure (CI) such as hydro or water. Under these circumstances, the activities provided to the public under the Heat Relief Strategy may no longer ensure adequate well-being and safety.

The decision to escalate the municipal response to an emergency level will be taken in consultation with the City's Emergency Management governance structure, including the Medical Officer of Health and other impacted City divisions and agencies, and coordinated by Toronto Emergency Management (TEM). A decision to escalate to a heat emergency will prompt the activation of the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC). The EOC coordinates the response and provides an established and recognized point of authority to coordinate response resources, personnel and incident information.

The City of Toronto Municipal code [Chapter 59](#) establishes the Toronto Emergency Management Program Committee (TEMPC), including the MOH who has the lead role in providing advice and direction on health-related matters. TEMPC has the authority and responsibility to initiate, co-ordinate, direct and otherwise bring about the implementation of Toronto's Emergency Plan.

## 3.0 Heat Relief Services

### 3.1 Overview

The 2024 Heat Relief Strategy encompasses the following services:

- Heat Relief Network
- Public Messaging
- Cool Spaces in Apartment Buildings
- Street Outreach
- Extended Hours of Operation for Public Pools

These services are continually available during the heat season and their availability is communicated to the public during Heat Warnings issued by ECCC. During Heat Warnings, the City will share public messaging on its owned channels including social and digital media platforms, the City's website, and leverage news releases to engage journalists to educate and promote the City's Heat Relief Network.

## 3.2 Heat Relief Network

The Heat Relief Network is a collection of more than 600 publicly accessible facilities across the City that provide air-conditioning, respite from heat and/or other forms of cooling.

The Heat Relief Network is active throughout the summer, including days when a Heat Warning is not issued by ECCC.

Cool Spaces in the Heat Relief Network include:

- Public libraries
- Civic centres
- Community centres
- Senior centres
- Public swimming pools
- Public splash & play pads & wading pools
- Malls
- YMCA centres

In addition to the Heat Relief Network, the City also funds and operates shelters, 24-hour respite sites and drop-ins to help support individuals experiencing homelessness. More information can be found at [toronto.ca/homelesshelp](http://toronto.ca/homelesshelp).

The public can find participating facilities on the [Cool Spaces Near You map](#).

Divisions and agencies with Cool Spaces that are part of the Heat Relief Network are to support TPH in ensuring key information is accurately reflected on the Cool Spaces Near You map, including site accessibility, amenities, and hours of operation. Should any changes in site status occur, divisions and agencies are to contact Toronto Public Health.

## 3.3 Public Messaging

Heat Relief public messaging includes management and posting of [Beat the Heat tips](#) on the City's webpage.

During Heat Warnings, information will be shared via City communications channels to ensure the public and media are aware of Heat Warning status and the availability of Cool Spaces through the Heat Relief Network. SPEC will coordinate with various DACs, including TPH, to ensure messaging is accurate and relevant spokespeople are available.



## 3.4 Cool Spaces in Apartment Buildings

Cool Spaces in Apartment Buildings refers to measures coordinated by the City to ensure cool spaces are readily available in apartment buildings and other multi-unit residences during the hot weather season. Such measures include:

- Ensuring landlords understand their obligations to residents and post the necessary heat-related information on their community notification boards.
- Educating tenants on ways to keep cool via provision of information through [Staying Healthy in Hot Weather](#).
- Sharing of [Beat the Heat](#) tips through various channels.

## 3.5 Street Outreach

Toronto Shelter & Support Services (TSSS) provides heat relief support for people experiencing homelessness by:

- Ensuring that heat relief opportunities are available at shelters, drop-ins and 24-hour respite sites.
- Operating the Streets to Homes street outreach program.

## 3.6 Extended Hours of Operation for Public Pools

During active Heat Warnings, Parks, Forestry & Recreation will provide additional cooling opportunities for the public by extending pool hours until 11:45 p.m. at the following seven outdoor pool locations:

- Alex Duff Pool, 779 Crawford St.
- Giovanni Caboto Pool, 1367 St. Clair Ave. W.
- McGregor Park, 2231 Lawrence Ave. E.
- Monarch Park, 115 Felstead Ave.
- Parkway Forest, 55 Forest Manor Rd.
- Smithfield Park, 175 Mount Olive Dr.
- Sunnyside Park/Gus Ryder Pool, 1755 Lake Shore Blvd. W.

During the extended evening hours, pool access will be walk-in only and online reservations will not be available for the public. However, reservations are available for clients with accessibility needs.

# 4.0 Roles & Responsibilities

## 4.1 City Divisions, Agencies & Corporations

### 4.1.1 Toronto Emergency Management (TEM)

- Coordinate and update the existing Heat Relief Strategy approved by City Council for 2024
- Administer Hot Weather Response Coordinating Committee membership
- Facilitate Hot Weather Response Coordinating Committee meetings as required
- Issues management as needed
- Maintain the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) in a state of readiness in the event of a Heat Emergency
- Support TPH in Heat Relief Network, as required

### 4.1.2 Toronto Public Health (TPH)

#### 4.1.2.1 Healthy Environments

- Facilitate the maintenance of the Heat Relief Network, including:
  - Confirm and maintain partners to determine participation (i.e., send confirmation letters, send training slides, send HRN signage to be posted)
  - Maintain [Cool Spaces Near You](#) webpage including ensuring information is up to date (e.g., hours of operation, features, etc.)
- Act as educator and spokesperson for health-related heat impacts, including:
  - Update [Staying Healthy in Hot Weather](#) webpage and any posted resources;
  - Ensure contact information for the public and Councillors is available upon request;
  - Respond to media inquiries and assist with news releases, as necessary.
  - Provide accurate and timely messaging and communications guidance to support other DACs, including SPEC.

#### 4.1.2.2 Child Health and Development (CHD)

- Regularly share heat health information and resources with clients through home visits, groups (e.g. prenatal & parenting), clinics (e.g. breastfeeding and developmental screening), and community settings.
- CHD also has a targeted hot weather response by Public Health Nurses to known clients who may be at high risk of severe health impacts due to hot weather during Heat Warnings.

### **4.1.3 Strategic Public & Employee Communications (SPEC)**

- Share information via City communications channels to ensure the public and media are aware of Heat Warnings status and the availability of Cool Spaces through the Heat Relief Network. This may include sharing of information via news releases and/or the City's website and social media accounts, often in collaboration with other DACs, including TPH.
- Collaborate with partners to review and update hot weather educational resources (e.g., health impacts, vulnerable populations). This information will continue to be available online and will be shared via social media throughout the summer season, and especially during Heat Warnings.

### **4.1.4 Customer Experience (311 Toronto)**

- Offer 24/7 telephone service to provide information about City services and programs, including hot weather response and the Heat Relief Network.

### **4.1.5 Corporate Real Estate Management (CREM)**

#### **4.1.5.1 Facilities Management**

- Maintain City facilities acting as Cool Spaces as part of the Heat Relief Network, including:
  - Building access
  - Custodial Services
- Advise TPH on any status changes of availability to City facilities acting as Cool Spaces.

#### **4.1.5.2 Corporate Security**

- Provide City facilities acting as Cool Spaces with security staff as required.

### **4.1.6 Municipal Licensing & Standards (MLS)**

#### **4.1.6.1 Toronto Animal Services**

- Develop and disseminate hot weather safety messages for pet owners and attend to sick or injured stray dogs or cats if confined or immobile, and critically sick, injured, or distressed wildlife if confined or immobile and attended by someone.
- Provide assistance to Toronto Police Service in circumstances in which a domestic animal's life is in imminent danger as a result of a Heat Warning and necessitates their removal

#### **4.1.6.2 RentSafe TO**

- Ensure that building owners and operators comply with building maintenance standards, including requirements to post the following on the tenant notification board:

- Location of an air-conditioned place or other space on the property, accessible to all tenants that can offer relief from uncomfortably warm temperatures
- Name, address and map to the nearest publicly accessible air-conditioned location (e.g. Heat Relief Network).

#### **4.1.7 Parks, Forestry & Recreation (PFR)**

- Division to provide information with telephone numbers and locations of City parks and services where people who are homeless can go to cool down
- Maintain PFR facilities being used as cool spaces as part of the Heat Relief Network
- Operate additional facilities and extended hours of cooling, including community centres, recreation facilities, swimming pools and splash pads

#### **4.1.8 Toronto Shelter & Support Services (TSSS)**

- Continue to operate shelters, drop-ins and 24-hour respite sites that remain open as a critical, essential service response.
- During Heat Warnings:
  - Enhance the number of Streets to Homes outreach teams to connect with people living outside and conduct wellness checks, hand out water and sunscreen, and encourage people to access a Cool Space.
  - Coordinate with Fred Victor, a community agency funded by the City, to conduct additional targeted outreach.

#### **4.1.9 Housing Secretariat (HS)**

- Sharing communications, resources and information with stakeholder networks.

#### **4.1.10 Seniors Services & Long-Term Care (SSLTC)**

- Sharing communications, resources, and information with stakeholder networks of Seniors groups.

#### **4.1.11 Social Development, Finance & Administration (SDFA)**

- Sharing communications, resources, and information with stakeholder networks.

#### **4.1.12 Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC)**

- Ensure cooling rooms are available onsite at TCHC properties.

#### **4.1.13 Toronto Employment & Social Services (TESS)**

- Sharing communications, resources, and information with stakeholder networks.

#### **4.1.14 Toronto Paramedic Services (TPS)**

- Report critical incidents (death or transfer of an individual to hospital believed to be heat-related where the environmental conditions observed by the paramedic indicate possible excessive heat exposure) to TPH for investigation.

#### **4.1.15 Toronto Public Libraries (TPL)**

- Maintain TPL facilities being used as Cool Spaces as part of the Heat Relief Network

### **4.2 Community Partners**

#### **4.2.1 Fred Victor**

- Operate street outreach program during extreme periods of heat, as per agreement with TSSS.

#### **4.2.2 Streets to Homes Outreach Partners**

- Support TSSS in heat relief street outreach efforts.

#### **4.2.3 Toronto Drop-In Network**

- Support in heat relief efforts with clients.

### **4.3 Other**

#### **4.3.1 Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC)**

- Issue Heat Warnings and other heat-related special weather events.
- Provide consultation services with City, as required.

# 5.0 Occupational Health & Safety

## 5.1 Health & Safety

The City is committed to providing and maintaining safe and healthy working conditions for all employees. Staff safety during hot weather and in particular during Heat Warnings is a priority. City employees have access to further information on how to avoid heat-related illness, which is posted on the City's internal website by People & Equity's Occupational Health and Safety. Other participating agencies and members are encouraged to provide additional information to their staff.

The City's Heat Stress Policy and related guidelines are available at: [Heat Stress – City of Toronto](#).

# Appendix A – Cleaner Air Spaces Pilot Project

In 2023, Ontario saw more than 700 fires and 441,000 hectares of forests burned between April and October, more than the 10-year average. The wildfire smoke from these forest fires is made up of a mixture of gases and fine particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>) produced when wood and other organic matter burn. Studies have shown inhalation of these air pollutants from wildfire smoke are associated with increased adverse health effects.

People at most risk of health effects due to poor air quality as a result of wildfire smoke are:

- Children, seniors, and pregnant women.
- People who have pre-existing respiratory or cardiovascular health conditions; these individuals may feel the effects of smoke earlier and more severely than others.
- People who perform physical outdoor work or participate in outdoor sports.

Wildland fire season in Ontario begins on April 1 and continues until October 31. Fires are more common during the spring (before the canopy cover is renewed and while there is still a large amount of dry vegetation on the forest floor) and summer (when lightning is more frequent). Both seasons tend to have hot, dry, and windy weather which can further spread fire. Due to climate change, hotter and drier conditions are expected in Ontario, increasing the risk of forest fire activity in the next several decades.

Following poor air quality experienced in Toronto during the 2023 wildland fire season, the City will pilot Cleaner Air Spaces in 2024 to provide spaces for short-term relief to people who may not have access to mechanical ventilation.

Included in the pilot are the following locations equipped with MERV 13 filters and mechanically cooled: City Hall, Metro Hall, Scarborough Civic Centre, East York Civic Centre, York Civic Centre, and North York Civic Centre and will run from May 15 through September 30 in tandem with the Heat Relief Network.

More information about the health impacts of wildfire smoke, safety advice and where to find is available [Wildfire Smoke Response Strategy – City of Toronto](#).

## Appendix B – Abbreviations

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| CI    | Critical Infrastructure                        |
| CREM  | Corporate Real Estate Management               |
| ECCC  | Environment and Climate Change Canada          |
| EOC   | Emergency Operations Centre                    |
| MLS   | Municipal Licensing & Standards                |
| MOH   | Medical Officer of Health                      |
| TEM   | Toronto Emergency Management                   |
| PFR   | Parks, Forestry & Recreation                   |
| SDFA  | Social Development, Finance & Administration   |
| SPEC  | Strategic Public & Employee Communications     |
| TSSS  | Toronto Shelter & Support Services             |
| TCHC  | Toronto Community Housing Corporation          |
| TEMPC | Toronto Emergency Management Program Committee |
| TESS  | Toronto Employment & Social Services           |
| TPH   | Toronto Public Health                          |
| TPL   | Toronto Public Libraries                       |