

# Strategies to Manage Extreme Heat in Schools

Throughout the year, Toronto experiences extreme heat days, prompting Environment Canada to issue heat advisories. High temperatures can impact student and staff well-being, making proactive measures essential for maintaining a comfortable learning environment. The Occupational Health and Safety Act does not define maximum temperatures for any workplace. Under the General Duty Clause of the Occupational Health and Safety Act, the Ministry of Labour has developed guidelines to deal with heat stress and assist employers in meeting their obligations. This resource has been developed to assist school principals and teachers in managing extreme heat in schools and can be used alongside the [Occupational Health and Safety Extreme Heat Guide](#).

## Understanding Heat Stress

Heat stress can occur quickly – especially during outdoor play, physical exertion, or during heat warnings. Recognizing the signs early and responding appropriately helps prevent serious health effects.

## Who is most at Risk?

Some individuals are more susceptible to heat stress including seniors and children less than 15 years of age. Heat stress can also be brought on from wearing excessive heavy clothing and from prolonged physical exertion during heat advisories. Staff members with a particular susceptibility to heat or medical concerns should speak with their Principal or Supervisor to determine appropriate accommodation.

## Be Proactive and Prepare for Extreme Heat

To manage the impact of heat warnings, typically during May through September, schools should create a heat response plan. Plans should be flexible and ready to implement when needed.

## Heat Response Plan: Considerations and Strategies

The information below can help inform the development of a plan for schools when managing extreme heat. The heat response plan should be customized to each location and shared by the principal with staff by May each year, and updated as necessary, so students and staff are prepared for extreme heat.

## When to Activate Your Heat Response Plan

- When heat waves occur – during 3 consecutive days of temperatures of 32° or higher;
- When the humidex reaches or exceeds 35°;
- When there is a smog alert combined with higher temperatures;
- When there is an Environment Canada Humidex advisory – ambient air temperatures and humidex exceeds 40°;
- When the need arises within the school based on temperatures within classrooms or in response to heat stress symptoms of students or staff.

## General Preparations for Extreme Heat

- Create a rotation plan/schedule for cooling stations and update as necessary.
- Inventory fans, ensure working condition, and order if needed.
- Prepare morning announcements and newsletter reminders (e.g., dress lightly, stay hydrated).

## Cooling Stations

Schools without air conditioning have designated cooling stations (e.g., gyms, libraries) where classes can rotate to access cooler areas. Coordinate with administration to schedule rotations as needed. Consider room temperature differences based on layout (e.g., south-facing rooms, upper floors may get hotter).



## Recognize the Symptoms of Heat Stress!

**Dizziness, nausea, confusion, excessive sweating, and fatigue are symptoms of heat stress.**

Find more information on [TDSB Extreme Heat Resources](#).

# Strategies to Manage Extreme Heat in Schools

## Classroom Strategies for Managing the Heat

During periods of extreme heat, teachers are encouraged to use their professional judgment, in discussion with their principal, to implement strategies that support student and staff well-being. Below you can find some considerations and strategies to support the management of extreme heat.

### Classroom Strategies

- Use fans for air circulation.
- Keep lights and computers off when possible.
- Close blinds/curtains to block direct sunlight and open doors/windows to promote airflow.
- Stay Hydrated – Take frequent water breaks and bring reusable water bottles.
- Take the learning outside – It may be cooler in shaded outdoor spaces than in the classroom.
- Refer to the cooling station rotation for your class visit to the cooling station.
- Reduce Heat Exposure – Turn off unnecessary heat-generating equipment.
- Adjust Physical Activity – Modify strenuous activities including gym and sports.
- Teach students to recognize signs of heat stress.
- Use a buddy system to help identify symptoms early.

### Use the Natural Environment

Take advantage of outdoor spaces to help stay cool:

- Use shaded, grassy, or treed areas for recess and outdoor learning.
- Avoid paved areas which retain heat.
- Bring classes outside when indoor spaces are overheated—but ensure students are protected from the sun.

### Gym, Sports & Outdoor Activities

- Schedule activities during cooler times of the day.
- Encourage sun protection (e.g., hats, sunscreen).
- Remind students to drink water frequently
- Shorten outdoor play periods when necessary.
- Consider the heat impact of sports gear.
- Monitor students and adapt activities based on student needs.

Extreme heat can significantly impact the well-being of both students and staff. By recognizing who is most at risk, understanding the signs of heat stress, and taking proactive steps—such as creating heat response plans, using cooling stations, modifying classroom routines, and adjusting outdoor activities—schools can help maintain a safe and comfortable learning environment.

For additional guidance, speak to your Principal or Supervisor or visit the [TDSB Extreme Heat Resources](#), which includes Sun Safety Fact Sheets and Lesson Plans to support heat management efforts and [Occupational Health and Safety Extreme Heat Guide](#).

Stay safe, stay cool, and be prepared.

#### Need More Info on Extreme Heat?

 Talk to your **Principal or Supervisor**

 Visit [TDSB Extreme Heat Resources](#) for:

- ✓ Sun Safety Fact Sheets
- ✓ [UV Index Poster](#)
- ✓ Lesson Plans
- ✓ [OH&S Extreme Heat Guide](#)

Stay safe. Stay cool. 