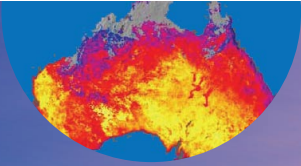


# Heatwave



Welcome to the November 2009 edition of the Department of Health's (DH) Heatwave newsletter.

This newsletter aims to provide an update on a number of activities currently being led by the department which we hope will be useful to your organisation.

With the recent unexpected hot weather, local councils and key stakeholders have been working hard to prepare for what appears to be another hot summer.

Hot summers have long been part of the Australian culture however, earlier, longer and hotter summers present challenges for people who are at risk of heat related illness.

The department is finalising the 'State Heatwave Plan' (the State Plan) which will bring together local and statewide activities into one document.

Local councils were funded to develop heatwave plans which document their Heatwave activities in a Plan for summer. Council Plans are due for submission with the department in November 2009.

The department will be undertaking an evaluation of the planning process at the end of summer. It is expected that local councils will also review their plans at this time with the intention of improving or expanding them for future summers.

**Dr John Carnie**  
Chief Health Officer

## Heatwave Planning Guide

The Heatwave Planning Guide was launched at a workshop on 12 June 2009. Local councils and stakeholders involved in its development should now have received a hard copy.

While the document has been developed to assist local councils in preparing a Heatwave Plan it may also be a useful tool for other organisations considering their response to extreme heat events.

The document can be downloaded from [www.health.vic.gov.au/environment/downloads/planning-guide.pdf](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/environment/downloads/planning-guide.pdf)

## Planning Seminar for local council

On 18th September the department hosted a second Heatwave Planning Seminar for local councils.

Representatives from the Red Cross, Office of Senior Victorians and the department's Aged Care Branch and Public Health Branch spoke and lead discussion on a range of issues including:

- Red Cross' role in community outreach programs
- Community registers (Office of Senior Victorians)
- Relief / cooling centres
- DH Heat alert system and thresholds
- DH Aged Care Branch summer strategy.

Copies of the presentation are available from the department's climate change website.

## Temperature thresholds

In research commissioned by the department, Monash University has developed heat health temperature thresholds for metropolitan Melbourne and for ten regional centres across the state. These thresholds will be used as a basis to notify stakeholders of an approaching, and then imminent heatwave and the need to activate their heatwave response plans.

A temperature (or heat health) threshold is the actual, or calculated temperature above which mortality and morbidity increases above a baseline measure. The thresholds vary depending on geographic location, demographic profile of the community and other vulnerability factors.

The Monash model explored the relationship between the temperature (maximum, minimum and mean daily temperatures) and excess mortality. The identified threshold is the actual or calculated mean temperature which results in the greatest contribution to increased mortality.

The following table lists the temperature threshold for each major centre and its surrounding district.

Major centre and surrounding district	Threshold
Hamilton	Mean 34°C
Geelong	Mean 28°C
Horsham	Mean 32°C
Ballarat	Mean 30°C
Mildura	Mean 35°C
Bendigo	Mean 32°C
Wodonga	Mean 30°C (when max is 40°C or above)
Shepparton	Mean 30°C
Latrobe Valley	Mean 30°C
Sale	Mean 30°C
Melbourne	Mean 30°C



## Heat Health Alert System

Last year the department trialled a heat health alert system to communicate forecast heatwaves to stakeholders including local councils.

Now that heat health temperature thresholds have been developed for all of Victoria the system will be widened to cover all Victorian Regions.

The department will monitor Bureau of Meteorology forecasts and send alerts when predicted temperatures will meet heat health thresholds.

These alerts will go to local councils, the department's regional offices and a range of stakeholders including Ambulance Victoria, the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and the Red Cross.

The system will include email alerts and possibly SMS notifications when a heatwave is predicted:

- up to 7 days before
- 3-4 days before and
- the day before or on the day of the heat wave.

The alerts will only recommend that stakeholders start to prepare (early in week) and then activate (closer to event day) their heatwave plans. What action is taken in response to the alerts should be documented in stakeholder's Heatwave Plan.

We have commenced contacting all local councils to obtain contact details for the alert system, other stakeholders are also welcome to receive the alerts.

Nominated contacts should have:

- Email and mobile phone access
- The knowledge and authority to activate all stages of the heatwave response
- Position specific contact details that will be available regardless of staff absences and personnel changes.

## Victoria's State Heatwave Plan

The Department is developing Victoria's State Plan for the summer of 2009-2010. The project is being managed by the Environmental Health Unit and has engaged with a wide cross-section of departmental program areas and external stakeholders throughout the development stages of the Plan.

The project is bringing together all relevant resources, action plans and initiatives to minimise health impacts in the event of a heatwave in the 2009-2010 summer season.

The project working group has conducted a detailed review of local and international resources for heatwave planning including:

- policy documents
- action statements
- academic reports and reviews
- existing heatwave plans and planning guides
- pilot projects
- discussions papers
- communication materials.

Consultation with key stakeholders will continue over the coming weeks to inform the development of the State Plan.

The State Plan is set for dissemination to stakeholders in December 2009.

## Emergency Relief Centres

As part of the planning process many local councils have considered the use of 'cooling centres' to provide relief for residents during a heatwave.

'Cooling centre' is a term that has been used overseas to describe emergency relief centres opened during heatwaves.

The department strongly encourages the use of a risk assessment approach during their planning processes as there are many issues that need to be considered. The discussion notes from the September forum detail a large range of these issues.

If a centre is to be opened during a heatwave it should be operated in accordance with Emergency Relief Centre guidelines.

Further information regarding this topic is available for local Councils on the Heatwave Quickplace including notes from the discussion at the September forum.

## Communication messages

A core component of the State Plan is information and communication resources targeting specific 'at risk' groups, their carers, the wider healthcare professional population, key stakeholder groups and the general community.

In addition to the messages used last summer we are also developing additional messages for application to specific target audiences and for wider application in the general community.

Final messages will be incorporated into a communication strategy within the State Plan, with a range of communication resource templates being developed for use by the department's own program areas, support agencies and key stakeholders.

## Quickplace

A Local Council Heatwave Planning Quickplace (members only website) has been set up to allow staff and consultants working on council Heatwave Plans to access and share information.

## Resources

DH Heatwave Website

<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/environment/climate/heatwave.htm>

DH Heat Stress Fact Sheet

[http://www.health.vic.gov.au/environment/downloads/heat\\_stress.pdf](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/environment/downloads/heat_stress.pdf)

DH Summer preparedness kits (Bushfire & Heatwave)

<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/bushfire/>

## Contacts

**Jessica Deacon**

**Ph:** 9096 5329

**E-mail:** [jessica.deacon@dhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:jessica.deacon@dhs.vic.gov.au)

**Jennifer Muscat**

**Ph:** 9096 5841

**E-mail:** [jennifer.muscat@dhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:jennifer.muscat@dhs.vic.gov.au)

**Julie Hoy**

Manager, Community Health Risk

**Ph:** 9096 5105

**E-mail:** [julie.hoy@dhs.vic.gov.au](mailto:julie.hoy@dhs.vic.gov.au)

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