Record breaking temperatures trigger safety alerts

The need to stay safe in the heat exceeds COVID-19 protocols, says Interior Health

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Record breaking temperatures in Princeton and across the Similkameen Valley triggered a heat alert from Environment Canada over the past week..

Wednesday, June 23, the mercury rose to 38 degrees Celsius, the hottest it's been in Princeton on that day since 1937 when the agency began collecting data. (The coldest June 26 was in 1939 when it was practically freezing at .06 Celsius.)

As of Monday, June 28, the three-day forecast was for temperatures to reach between 40 and 43 degrees, before starting to cool off for the rest of the week.

Also on June 28, BC Hydro was reporting localized outages due to high demand for electricity while school bus service in the Similkameen-Nicola School District was cancelled for two days due to extreme heat.

In a news release posted June 25, Interior Health (IH) said the health risks posed by heat take precedence over COVID-related protocols.

"Interior Health medical health officers advise at this time that risks from extreme heat exceed risks from COVID-19," stated the release.

"While the extreme heat alert is in place cooling centres will be open, coordinated by municipalities, and no one should be denied access to these centres because of concerns about crowding or physical distancing.

"If people are wearing a mask and have difficulty breathing, they should remove the mask, whether they are indoors or outside, as wearing a mask may impact thermal regulation during heat events."

According to the health authority, excessive heat exposure can lead to weakness, disorientation and exhaustion. In severe cases, it can also lead to heat stroke, also known as sunstroke. Heat stroke can be a life-threatening medical emergency.

IH offered the following tips for staying safe during hot weather.

1. Plan your outdoor activity before 11 a.m. or after 4 p.m., to avoid the most intense sun.

2. Drink plenty of non-alcoholic fluids. Water is the best choice.

3. Avoid physical work or exercise outside in the heat of the day.

4. If you must work or exercise outside, drink two to four cups of water each hour, even before you feel thirsty.

"If people are wearing a mask and have difficulty breathing, they should remove the mask, whether they are indoors or outside, as wearing a mask may impact thermal regulation during heat events"

- Interior Health



Temperatures were forecast to reach 43 degrees Celsius in Princeton on Wednesday, June 30. (MCG photo)

5. Rest breaks are important and should be taken in the shade.

6. Apply sunscreen to prevent sunburn, but remember this doesn't protect from the heat.

7. Stay in the shade, or create your own shade with lightweight, light-coloured, loose-fitting clothing, a wide brimmed hat, and/or an umbrella.

8. If you're struggling to keep cool, move indoors to an air-conditioned building or take a cool bath or shower. At temperatures above 30 C (86 F), fans alone may not be able to prevent heat related illness.

9. Never leave children or pets alone in a parked car. Temperatures can rise to 52 C (125 F) within 20 minutes inside a vehicle when the outside temperature is 34 C (93 F). Leaving the car windows slightly open will not keep the inside of the vehicle at a safe temperature.

10. Regularly check older adults, infants and children, those doing a lot of physical activity or working outside, and people with chronic disease or mental illness for signs of heat-related illness. Make sure they are keeping cool and drinking plenty of fluids. Check on those who are unable to leave their homes, and people whose judgment may be impaired.

BC Hydro also offered suggestions for staying cool during the heat wave, such as closing drapes and blinds, and opting to use smaller appliances such as the microwave, crock pot or toaster oven.

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