

Beat the Heat

Heat and Health: Babies and young children factsheet

What is extreme heat and is it dangerous?

Extreme heat or heatwaves are periods of unusually hot weather. Climate change is resulting in more hot days and more intense heatwaves in Australia.

Extreme heat can cause severe illness, hospital admission and even death. Before, during and after a period of hot weather it's important that you and your family keep cool and stay hydrated.

Why are babies and young children at risk in hot weather?

Babies and young children can become unwell in the heat more easily than others. This is because they can overheat and dehydrate quickly and are less able to make choices to stop themselves overheating.

Your child's body normally keeps itself cool by sweating and moving more blood towards the skin.

In extreme heat, or if your child is physically active in hot weather, their body's natural cooling system can begin to fail. Their body temperature can increase to dangerous levels, leading to severe heat-related illness including heat stroke and heat exhaustion.

Heat-related illness is more likely to happen when your child is dehydrated and can't produce enough sweat to help them cool down.

How can I prepare my family for hot weather?

- Check that air-conditioners, fans, refrigerators, and freezers are working properly.
- Learn about [safe food and medicine storage](#) during hot weather, and especially during and after a power outage.
- Make a plan with family, friends and neighbours to keep in contact during hot weather and know who to call if you need help.
- Make sure you have contact details for your doctor, pharmacist, or other source of good health advice such as [Healthdirect](#).
- Speak to your doctor if you are unsure about how your health condition or medication might affect your ability to cope during hot weather.
- Make sure you have enough food and medicine for everyone in your home so you don't have to go out in the heat.
- Know where in your local area you can go to get out of the heat. Places that may be cooler than your home include:
 - air-conditioned public buildings such as libraries and shopping centres
 - parks with plenty of trees and shade
- If you can, consider some changes to your home to help keep it cooler in hot weather. More information is available at [AdaptNSW](#) and [Your Home](#). Changes could include:
 - installing curtains or blinds on the side of your home that faces the sun
 - installing external awnings, shutters or other shading to prevent sun shining on windows
 - insulating your home to help keep it cooler inside when weather is hot.

How do I keep babies and young children safe in the heat?



Keep your child cool

- Understand that babies and young children can overheat and dehydrate quickly.
- Check on your child regularly during hot weather.
- Keep your child out of the heat and encourage them to reduce their activity levels.
- Spend time being active outside early in the morning when its cooler.
- Dress your child in light, loose clothing and protect them from the sun with hats and sunscreen.
- Cool your child with a damp cloth, face washer or lukewarm baths, or sponge them down with lukewarm water, never cold water.
- Make sure air can circulate around your baby and remove padding around cots to assist air flow.
- Put wet towels or sheets near a bassinette or cot to cool nearby air.
- Prams can become hot:
 - Do not leave your baby to sleep in a pram in hot weather.
 - If possible, remove the back panel from a pram to help with air flow to keep the air inside the pram cooler.
- Never leave babies or children alone in the car, no matter the weather. Even in mild weather, cars quickly become hot.
- Never cover a baby capsule in a car with a rug or towel to shade from the sun as this restricts air movement.
- Use sunshades on car windows.



Keep your home cool

- Use air-conditioning, if available. If you do not have an air conditioner, use fans to circulate air but make sure fans are out of your child's reach, and do not point a fan directly at your child.
- Close curtains and blinds to block out the sun.
- Spend time in the coolest area of your home.
- Use stoves and ovens as little as possible as these can heat up your home.
- When it gets cooler outside, open your windows and doors to let warm air out and cool air in.
- If you can safely travel without getting too hot, go to cooler places in your local area.



Stay hydrated

- For babies under six months, they may need or demand extra feeds during hot weather.
 - For breastfed babies, breast milk provides for their needs and extra water is not necessary. Breastfeeding mothers should also make sure they drink plenty of fluids.
 - For bottle fed babies, the number of feeds may need to be increased.
- For children six months and over, offer extra drinks in hot weather - the best drink is water. You can find more hydration tips on the [Healthdirect](#) website.
- Carry water with you when outdoors.

What are the signs that my baby or young child has a heat-related illness?

It is not always easy to tell if your baby or young child is affected by hot weather. When it's hot, it's important to check for the following signs of dehydration or heat-related illness.

Severe dehydration or severe heat-related illness

- Drowsy or confused
- More irritable than usual
- Sunken eyes and may not have tears when crying
- Refuses to drink or extremely thirsty

- Skin is pale or cold
- Looks unwell

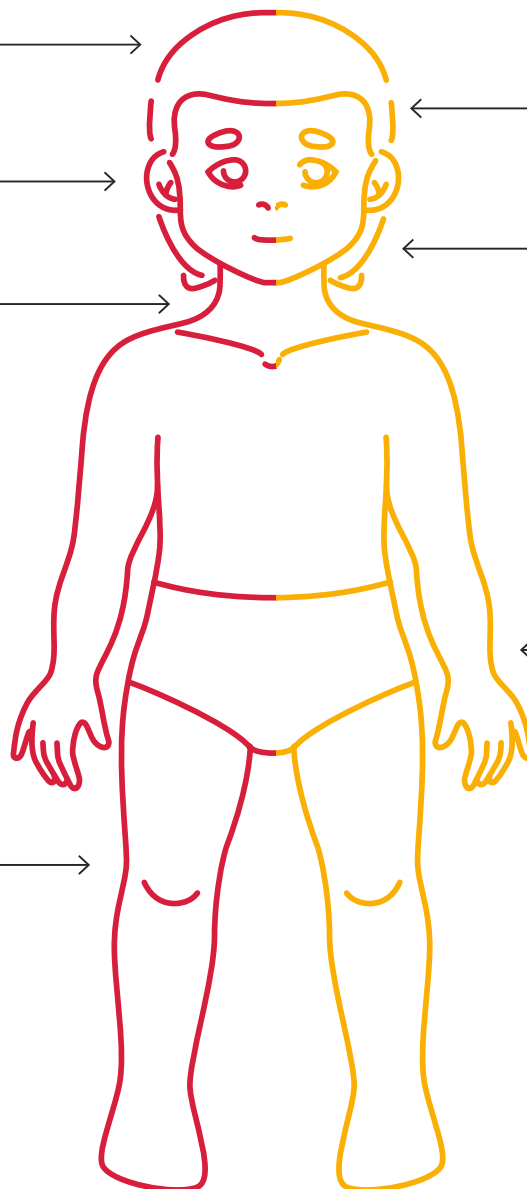
- Body is limp or floppy

Mild dehydration or mild heat-related illness

- Nausea or headaches for older children

- Dry skin and mouth

- Has fewer wet nappies, and urine is darker in colour



What to do

If your baby or young child has symptoms of severe dehydration or heat-related illness, call triple zero (000) and ask for an ambulance.

What to do

If your baby or child has symptoms of mild dehydration and you are worried, see your doctor or phone healthdirect on 1800 022 222 for health information and advice 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

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For more information, advice and tips:

Scan the QR code or visit:

www.health.nsw.gov.au/beattheheat