

Residential Aged Care Service

Caring for Older People in Warmer Weather

High temperatures are often experienced across Australia every summer and you must be alert to the possibility of heatwaves.

Residential care providers need to be particularly aware of the severe hazards associated with extreme heat events. Care recipients may not understand the danger of being outside in the heat for too long.

Heatwave checklist

To assist the comfort of care recipients and for you to meet your responsibilities under the *Aged Care Act 1997*, particularly Outcome 2 (Health and Personal Care) and Outcome 4 (Physical Environment and Safe Systems) of the Accreditation Standards, the department has created a checklist which may be useful in considering the activities you may need to undertake during a heatwave.

You may also find it useful to display this checklist as a reminder for your staff during summer months.

Clinical assessment

A clinical assessment will be required if a care recipient shows any signs of deterioration. The effects of heat-related illnesses can range from mild conditions such as a rash or cramps to very serious conditions such as severe confusion or heat stroke. If you are concerned about a care recipient's wellbeing their general practitioner should be contacted immediately.

Further information

Further information is available from state and territory health department websites. The Victorian Government has also produced a comprehensive 'Heatwave Ready Resource' for residential aged care services.

Checklist

Before a heatwave

- assess which care recipients are at risk - who has limited capacity to keep cool; or which areas of the facility are prone to being hot
- ensure entry/exit points can be monitored
- ensure cooling systems in the facility are adequate and working effectively
- ensure alternative forms of fluid, such as jelly, ice-cream or fruit juice blocks are available.

During a heatwave

- ensure that the temperature in care recipients' rooms and within the facility is kept comfortable, keeping curtains and blinds closed to reduce excess heat
- monitor entry/exit points to avoid the unsupervised departure of care recipients during extreme heat events
- be aware that care recipients may be at particular risk following high overnight temperatures
- ensure small amounts of fluids are readily available, rather than large amounts of fluids less frequently
- avoid serving caffeinated or alcoholic beverages
- provide care recipients with frequent small meals
- help care recipients to keep skin covered when exposed to direct sunlight and to wear loose fitting clothing
- avoid taking care recipients outside between 11am and 3pm
- offer tepid showers or sponging
- look for signs of heat stress, such as nausea or changes in appearance including red, pale or severely dry skin
- ask for a clinical assessment if care recipient shows any signs of deterioration.