

# Emergency preparedness for disability service providers

From time to time there are emergencies resulting from a range of events, including fires, heat waves, storms, floods and disruptions to essential services such as power and gas. Power outages can be caused by extreme weather, such as lightning, floods, heatwaves, bushfires, high winds, and trees falling on powerlines.

The following summary information is provided to assist disability service providers better prepare for emergencies, extreme heat days and possible power failures.

This document should be read in conjunction with the department's Vulnerable people in emergencies policy (May 2015) and Emergency preparedness policy for clients and services (September 2017). These documents are available on the [service provider page](https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/emergency-preparedness). <https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/emergency-preparedness>

## Service provider responsibilities

As a service provider, you must plan for all emergencies to ensure the health and safety of your clients and staff.

As a service provider your emergency preparedness responsibilities include:

- having emergency plans in place
- understanding and being prepared to take action on Code Red fire danger days
- being prepared to make informed decisions about client safety in the event of an emergency
- ensuring staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities in the event of an emergency.

## Clients need to be informed of emergency procedures

Clients need to be:

- involved in emergency drills
- informed of emergency procedures
- advised when an emergency is happening.

## Plan for possible Code Red fire danger days

The Code Red fire-danger rating forecasts the worst conditions for bushfires.

A Code Red day may pose a significant risk to clients in residential services or those attending a day services, particularly those in high bushfire risk areas.

Services need to continually monitor risks and warnings through local networks, as well as mainstream media, and maintain regular contact with local emergency services, particularly during high-risk periods. Services must be prepared to act where an emergency may impact on the safety of clients or staff.

Mandatory 'directed actions' apply for disability services located in the areas that are at extreme risk (called VFRR-B extreme risk areas) on Code Red days due to the elevated level of risk.

Directed actions are specific actions mandated by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) which services must undertake in preparation for, and in response to, emergencies.

For more detailed information related to responding to Code Red days please see [Emergency preparedness policy for clients and services \(September 2017\)](https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/emergency-preparedness) <https://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/emergency-preparedness> or visit the [Country Fire Authority website for information on Fire Danger Ratings](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/warnings-restrictions/about-fire-danger-ratings/) <http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/warnings-restrictions/about-fire-danger-ratings/>.

## Plan for possible power failure

Your emergency plan needs to include a plan for possible power outages.

Power outages can happen at any time. To prepare, you should have an energy plan and kit, which includes:

- access to a phone, such as a charged mobile phone or land line that doesn't rely on electricity to operate
- alternate lighting, such as a torch or a battery-operated light
- alternate cooking arrangements (such as barbeque or takeaway), including a plan for clients who require vitamised meals
- a battery-powered radio. Stay tuned to news services to get updates on weather conditions and power outages
- access to fresh water

For information on power outages visit [Safety and emergencies: Power outages](https://www.energy.vic.gov.au/safety-and-emergencies/power-outages) <https://www.energy.vic.gov.au/safety-and-emergencies/power-outages>.

## Uninterrupted power supply may be required

Some clients may require an uninterrupted supply of power because they:

- use life support equipment
- have a medical condition that requires continuous power supply; or
- have other special needs.

Energy providers keep a database of power dependent people. Service providers must:

- have a plan in place to identify people with a special need for uninterrupted power
- assist the client to report this to their electricity retailer
- ensure the retailer has the client's up-to-date telephone number and contact details.

## Extreme heat days

Extreme heat or heatwave is a period of unusual and uncomfortable hot weather that could negatively affect human health. Extreme heat can also affect community infrastructure (such as power supply and public transport) and other services. Extreme heat can affect everyone, however some people, including people with a disability, are more vulnerable.

The Department of Health and Human Services operates a heat health alert system to notify the department's program areas, hospitals, health and community service providers and the general public via email about forecasted extreme heat conditions which are likely to impact human health. The heat health alert system operates annually between November to the end of March.

Heat health alerts are issued via the department's email subscription service. To subscribe to receive heat health alerts and other emergency advice from the department visit [Alerts, advisories, newsletters and digests](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/newsletters) <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/newsletters>.

An email will be sent requesting you confirm your subscription. Please ensure that you activate your subscription by logging in to your email account and following the steps to confirm your subscription.

Further information about the extreme heat and the alert system is available on the Health website at [Heat health alerts](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/climate-weather-and-public-health/heatwaves-and-extreme-heat/heat-health-alerts) <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/climate-weather-and-public-health/heatwaves-and-extreme-heat/heat-health-alerts>.

For more information on how to support your clients please read 'Appendix 1. Extreme heat – information for staff'.

## Important contacts

Record the contact telephone numbers you will need during an emergency or a power outage.

Keep the list up to date and somewhere safe and accessible to all staff, such as on a noticeboard.

### Examples of an emergency contact list

Contact	When	Telephone number
Faults and Emergencies number on your electricity bill (your local electricity distributor)	For information about power outages	
Your local council	For information on emergency services available in your area, particularly if your clients are elderly, disabled or need special help	
Your electricity retail company	To report special needs if you require uninterrupted power	
SES	For storm and flood assistance	132 500
VIC SES Flood and Storm Information line	For general information on storms and floods	1300 VIC SES or 1300 842 737
Emergency Services	For life threatening emergencies	000
Department of Health and Human Services	Guidelines for maintaining food safety in emergency situations, including power failures	1300 364 352

### How to access other emergency information in Victoria

[Vic Emergency](http://emergency.vic.gov.au/respond/) <http://emergency.vic.gov.au/respond/> is the single all-emergencies website for Victoria.

Download the Vic Emergency app on your mobile phone to receive warnings and notifications about fires and other emergencies. The app is free.

Emergency warnings will be broadcast on ABC local radio and commercial radio stations across Victoria. For a list of broadcasters visit [Emergency Management Victoria](https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/responsibilities/victorias-warning-system/emergency-broadcasters/official-emergency-broadcasters-in) < https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/responsibilities/victorias-warning-system/emergency-broadcasters/official-emergency-broadcasters-in>

For up to date weather warnings and forecasts visit the [Bureau of Metrology](http://www.bom.gov.au/) website <http://www.bom.gov.au/>

## Appendix 1: Extreme heat – information for staff

### What your staff need to know

- which clients are most at risk
- how to assist clients to reduce the risk of heat related illnesses
- how to recognise heat related symptoms
- what to do if a client is heat affected

### Extreme heat can affect anyone however people most at risk

- are aged over 65 years, especially those living alone
- have a medical condition such as diabetes, kidney disease or mental illness
- are taking medications that may affect the way the body reacts to heat such as:
  - allergy medicines (antihistamines)
  - blood pressure and heart medicines (beta-blockers)
  - seizure medicines (anticonvulsants)
  - water pills (diuretics)
  - antidepressants or antipsychotics
- have problematic alcohol or drug use
- have a disability
- have trouble moving around such as those who are bed bound or in wheelchairs
- pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers
- babies and young children
- are overweight or obese
- work or exercise outdoors
- have recently arrived from cooler climates

Visit the Better Health Channel for more information about:

- [Heat stress and heat-related illness](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/heat-stress-and-heat-related-illness) <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/heat-stress-and-heat-related-illness>
- [Heat stress - preventing heat stroke](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/heat-stress-preventing-heatstroke) <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/heat-stress-preventing-heatstroke>
- [Heat stress – older people](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/heat-stress-preventing-heatstroke) <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/heat-stress-preventing-heatstroke>

### Assisting clients to reduce the risk of heat related illnesses

On days above 30 degrees Celsius, encourage your clients to:

- drink plenty of water, even if they don't feel thirsty
- spend as much time as possible in cool or air conditioned buildings (shopping centres, libraries or community centres)
- wear light coloured, loose fitting clothing
- stay out of the sun during the hottest part of the day
- wear a hat and apply sunscreen
- avoid strenuous activity, cancel or postpone outings
- avoid alcohol and caffeine
- close curtains or blinds to block out the sun
- use wet towels and cold foot baths to cool themselves down

# Remember to never leave anyone in a car on a hot day.

## What to do if a client is heat affected

If a client experiences the following symptoms, seek medical assistance:

- muscle cramps
- paleness and sweating
- rapid heart rate
- nausea, vomiting
- dizziness, headache
- confusion, seizure or collapse, this requires urgent medical attention, **call Triple Zero (000)** for an ambulance.

If you think someone is suffering from a heat related illness call **NURSE-ON-CALL on 1300 60 60 24** for 24-hour health advice or take the client to their doctor if you are unwell.

## Prepare your service for extreme heat in advance

Make your building/home as cool as possible by installing external blinds, window coverings or shade cloths on the outside of the building.

Check that air conditioners and fans work well, have air conditioners serviced if required.

Store medicines safely at the recommended temperature.

## Keeping food safe if a power outage occurs

It is important to consider the safety of the food supply and ability to cook in the event of a power outage. Food safety practices need to be followed to avoid food poisoning.

Try to keep cold and frozen food cold:

- move food from the fridge to the freezer
- if available put bagged ice under food packages in the freezer (if power failure lasts longer than 1 hour)
- place an insulating blanket over cold or frozen food where possible
- only open fridge and freezer doors when absolutely necessary.

Please discard food if unsure whether it is safe to be eaten.

For further information about food safety during power outages visit: [Health Victoria](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/food-safety/food-safety-information-for-consumers/food-safety-during-power-outages)

<<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/food-safety/food-safety-information-for-consumers/food-safety-during-power-outages>>

## Keep medicines safe during power outages

Exposure to high temperatures can make some medicines less effective and harmful to clients, insulin is an example of a medicine that is sensitive to heat.

Medicines need to be stored at the temperatures indicated by the manufacturer's instructions.

In preparation for power outages, talk with a pharmacist to make sure you have a plan to store medicines at the appropriate temperature.

## Information about heatwaves and health

The following websites provide useful information.

Visit [Emergency Management Victoria](https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/responsibilities/state-emergency-plans/state-extreme-heat-sub-plan) <<https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/responsibilities/state-emergency-plans/state-extreme-heat-sub-plan>> to view the State Emergency Response Plan Extreme heat Sub-plan which outlines the Victorian arrangements for the coordinated response to the impacts and consequences of extreme heat events (including heatwaves) on the community, infrastructure, and services.

The Department of Health and Human Services heat health alert system will notify subscribers of forecast heatwave conditions. To sign up for alerts visit [Health Victoria](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/climate-weather-and-public-health/heatwaves-and-extreme-heat/heat-health-alerts-subscribe) <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/climate-weather-and-public-health/heatwaves-and-extreme-heat/heat-health-alerts-subscribe>

You will be sent an email requesting confirmation of your subscription. Please confirm your subscription to ensure you receive alerts.

The health website also has information on:

- [Keeping food safe during power outages](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/food-safety/food-safety-information-for-consumers/food-safety-during-power-outages) < https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/food-safety/food-safety-information-for-consumers/food-safety-during-power-outages>
- [Bushfires and public health](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/climate-weather-and-public-health/bushfires-and-public-health) < https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/climate-weather-and-public-health/bushfires-and-public-health>
- [Climate change and public health](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/climate-weather-and-public-health/climate-change-and-public-health) < https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/climate-weather-and-public-health/climate-change-and-public-health>
- [Dust storms and health](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/climate-weather-and-public-health/airborne-dust) < https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/climate-weather-and-public-health/airborne-dust>.

## For more information

Visit [Extreme heat and heatwaves](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/climate-weather-and-public-health/heatwaves-and-extreme-heat) <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/climate-weather-and-public-health/heatwaves-and-extreme-heat>

A range of heat brochures and posters are available at: [Health Victoria](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/climate-weather-and-public-health/heatwaves-and-extreme-heat/heatwave-community-resources) <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/climate-weather-and-public-health/heatwaves-and-extreme-heat/heatwave-community-resources>

For copies of the Red Cross factsheet on advice for people on how to coping in hot weather visit [Redcross Heatwaves and hot weather](https://www.redcross.org.au/how-to-keep-cool-in-heatwaves) <https://www.redcross.org.au/how-to-keep-cool-in-heatwaves>.

The State Heat Plan [Emergency Management Victoria](https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/responsibilities/state-emergency-plans) <https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/responsibilities/state-emergency-plans>.

Register to receive heat health alerts at [Health Victoria](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/newsletters) <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/newsletters>.

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Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.

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ISBN 978-1-76069-350-3

Available at [Emergency preparedness](http://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/emergency-preparedness) <http://providers.dhhs.vic.gov.au/emergency-preparedness>