ENSURE LEARNING SPACES ARE CLIMATE READY FOR WILDFIRE SMOKE & EXTREME HEAT

When schools and child care settings don't have air conditioning or cooling systems, it can be tricky to know how to keep indoor spaces safe during extreme heat and wildfire smoke events – especially when they happen at the same time. Both can impact your health. **Prioritize keeping cool** because overheating can be more dangerous than smoke exposure.

MAKE A PLAN Before the wildfire smoke/extreme heat season starts

Expand your emergency plan to include climate readiness.

- Build in wildfire smoke and extreme heat preparedness and response measures.

Assess your setting's capacity to keep indoor air clean and cool.

- Review Health Canada's Guidance for Cleaner Air Spaces during Wildfire Smoke Events.
- If your facility is not equipped to maintain clean and cool indoor air, identify an alternate setting such as a community centre that has both air cooling and filtration.
- If moving offsite won't be feasible, designate specific room(s) and equip them with air conditioning and filtration (e.g., portable heat pumps, portable air cleaners).

Monitor for air quality and heat – both indoors and outdoors.

- Set up the WeatherCAN app to get air quality alerts and heat warnings for your location.
- Monitor indoor temperatures. Risk increases at temperatures greater than 26°C, and above 31°C can be dangerous, especially for susceptible groups.
- Measure relative humidity. Between 35% and 50% is recommended.
- Use air sensors, if possible, to compare indoor and outdoor levels of fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$) – the primary pollutant of concern in smoke – and to check how well the filtration system is working. Current $PM_{2.5}$ levels across Canada are available at AQMap.ca.

TAKE ACTION During a wildfire smoke and extreme heat event

Keep smoke and heat out. Filter the indoor air and keep it cool.

- Keep windows and doors closed, if it is safe to do so without overheating.
- Block the sun by using awnings and closing curtains and blinds during the day.
- Limit the use of exhaust fans such as bathroom fans as they can pull smoke indoors.
- Use a high-quality air filter in the ventilation system. Check the filter(s) often and change when they appear dirty.
- Use a portable air cleaner (commercial or DIY) that can filter fine particles ($PM_{2.5}$).
- Limit activities that can increase $PM_{2.5}$ levels indoors (e.g., frying food, vacuuming).
- Schedule activities that generate heat (e.g., use of oven, dryer, dishwasher) to cooler times of the day.

Know when it's no longer safe to remain.

- If indoor temperatures approach dangerous levels and there is too much wildfire smoke to open windows, move to a safer location.

CHILDREN ARE MORE AT RISK

Children are more susceptible to the health impacts of wildfire smoke.

- Their bodies, brains and lungs are still developing.
- They breathe more for their size compared to adults.

Children are at increased risk of heat-related illness.

- Their bodies have limited ability to adjust to heat.
- They can get dehydrated more easily.
- Their sweating rates are lower than adults.

Young children may not be able to communicate when they are feeling unwell.

Climate-related extreme weather events can also affect mental health and have been associated with depression and anxiety in children.

To learn about personal protective practices that can help keep children and staff safe, see Health Canada's Wildfire smoke with extreme heat resource.

Learn more

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Healthy Environments for Learning Day

Financial contribution from Health Canada Santé Canada

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