

Responding to heatwave emergencies

The following are examples of checklists of what to do during the activation phase of an emergency.
The steps outlined can be used in the event of a severe emergency.



AH&MRC
Aboriginal Health & Medical
Research Council of NSW

RESPONSE

STANDBY

ACTION

STANDDOWN

Heatwaves can be defined as periods of three or more days when high maximum and high minimum temperatures are unusual for that location. However, definitions vary and the severity is affected by the ability of a community to adapt to the heat (based on previously experienced temperatures and geographical location).

The Bureau of Meteorology define heatwave severity in a scale which relates to the heat's potential impacts:¹⁶

- No heatwave
- Low heatwave – Most people will have adequate capacity to cope with the heat.
- Severe heatwave – Level of heatwave will be challenging for some vulnerable groups including pregnant women, over 65s, babies/young children and those with a chronic illness.
- Extreme Heatwave – Exceptionally high temperatures that will affect even healthy people who do not take precautions and can affect infrastructure such as transport and power.

The following steps can be used in the event of a heat wave occurring. If a bushfire is a risk/anticipated, this checklist should be used in conjunction with the activation checklist for [Bushfires](#).

During the days leading up to an emergency

Activity Monitor the emerging risk

Monitor relevant NSW emergency services and other websites.

- NSW RFS [bushfire map and warnings](#).
- NSW SES [warnings](#) or on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#).
- [NSW weather warnings](#) from the Bureau of Meteorology.
- Local social media pages.
- Information about [power outages](#).

Check [ABC local radio](#) for alerts, updates, and evacuation centre locations.

Check road conditions and closures at [Live Traffic](#).

Consider discussing the emerging risk with the AH&MRC.

Work collaboratively with the LEMC to identify whether heat refuges will be established and if so, ensure centres are culturally safe and responsive.

Activity Prepare your staff and services

Plan alternatives for loss of power, access, communications, and operations.

- Identify and support staff members to work remotely.
- Confirm communications methods with staff and patients e.g. mass-SMS system,
- Confirm communications methods with community e.g. social media
- Assess pre-existing patient appointments and consider telehealth or telephone appointments, or rescheduling appointments to a later date.
- Maintenance of [cold chain](#) for vaccines and critical medications.

Consider staffing plan over the coming period:

Dedicate a staff member to oversee work rosters. Ensure adequate staffing, allowing for absenteeism in the event of an emergency or illness.

Consider liaising with other services that are not expected to be affected by the disaster that might be able to supply surge staffing.

Ensure **emergency kits** are packed and that batteries/vital equipment is functioning.

Ensure adequate supplies of PPE, medicines, and vaccines stockpiles.

Identify whether material aid and emergency relief services are needed and activate **Material Aid plan** as required.

Download and print a copy of your business continuity plan and local emergency plan.

Download and print a copy of your contact lists. Save important contact numbers on your phone.

Download a vulnerable patient list, including a list of medications, and ensure appropriate medical staff have access to the list securely. Consider performing a medicine supply check/issuing repeat prescriptions to ensure that vulnerable patients have a supply of vital medication (such as insulin and anti-epileptic drugs).

Backup data and secure documents.

Prepare communications to staff that can be updated during the emergency, including:

- Links to NSW emergency services and local websites.
 - **Key health messages** and associated health effects of the emergency.
 - Request staff to identify and consider the needs of any vulnerable patients known to them.
 - Remind staff to review their own household emergency and evacuation plans, in case of bushfire.
 - Determine if any modifications to their work plan are needed e.g. remote working.
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Prepare communications to patients:

- Links to NSW emergency services and local websites for up-to-date information.
 - **Key health messages** and associated health effects of the emergency.
 - Plans for how the ACCHO will operate during the emergency and how to seek help.
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Keep building clear of excess rubbish, leaves, litter and flammable materials.

Activity **Support your community with their preparations**

Inform community of key information regarding the floods/tsunamis/storm/hurricane:

- Links to NSW emergency services and local websites for up-to-date information.
 - **Key health messages** and associated health effects of the emergency. Consider translating critical health messages for your community.
 - A reminder to prepare or locate their home emergency plans.
 - Provide additional information and support to known vulnerable community members.
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Confirm with local council, charities and commercial facilities regarding location and opening hours of heat refuges and include this information when delivering key messages to the community.

Day 0 and during the emergency

Activity Initial response

Activate your business continuity plan/emergency plan.

Notify the AH&MRC of the emergency to facilitate immediate assistance and/or allow AH&MRC to be on standby

Continue to monitor for updates and assess status

Continue to attend inter-agency meetings and disseminate key information to staff, partners and community. Communication should include leadership and key contacts during the emergency.

Activity Continue to monitor emergency broadcasts for updates.

Assess expected impacts in the coming hours, days, weeks. If bushfires become anticipated at any stage, activate **bushfire plan**. If community is at risk of isolation from essential services, activate **isolation plan**.

Conduct needs assessment of the impact of the heatwave on the local community, and update as required:

- Is the community able to access adequate shade and heat refuges?
- Are there any issues with water shortages/access to clean water (each person needs roughly 7.5-15L/day for drinking, cooking and maintenance of basic hygiene)?
- Has there been an increase in the volume of calls for medical, social and material assistance related to the heatwave and are these able to be met with current resources?
- Are there any ongoing concerns about access to essential medicine/staffing and equipment/function of the buildings utilised by the ACCHO?
- Are there any concerns related to animal safety/welfare or threat from animals/vermin to humans.
- Has adequate and helpful information been given to staff and community?
- Are there any emerging concerns e.g., communicable diseases, community tensions, mental health, or staffing factors?

Consider writing and sharing regular SitReps to represent the impact on your community and its ongoing needs. This document can be updated and used to provide information to key stakeholders.

Review stock of PPE, medicines, vaccines and essential material aid stockpiles and order more in advance as needed.

Activity Manage your staff and services

Provide regular updates to staff:

- Information about the emergency and any additional risks. Refer to NSW emergency services and local websites.
- Reinforce key health messages.
- Consider and identify vulnerable patients known to them.
- Reassess modifications to work plans, including working from home.

Reassess appointment plans. Reschedule or set up telehealth appointments as needed.

Advise patients and visitors about your practice operations and evacuation plans where relevant, including:

- in-person to patients and visitors on your premises at the time;
- online to all other patients and visitors; and
- use your social media accounts (if available), website or phone to advise patients and visitors about your practice operations.

Review stock of PPE, medicines, vaccines and essential material aid stockpiles and order more in advance as needed.

Check-in with patients and families on “vulnerable list”

Document and respond to emerging issues. Escalate issues to the AH&MRC if needed.

Continue to keep building clear of excess rubbish, leaves, litter and flammable materials.

Activity Support your community

Provide regular updates to community about the emergency:

- Link to NSW emergency services and local websites.
- **Key health messages** and associated health effects of the emergency.
- Provide additional information and support to known vulnerable community members.
- Information from partner organisations, such as location of heat refuges.

Immediately after the emergency

Activity Assessing impact and returning to business as usual

Continue to monitor emergency broadcasts for updates.

Assess the status of resource stockpiles and replenish as appropriate

Assess impact of the heatwave on staff:

- Were any staff adversely affected by the emergency?
- What have been the psychological impacts on staff?
- Are rosters for coming weeks appropriate? Do certain staff need extra time off to recover?

Assess impact of the heatwave on patients:

- Do missed appointments need to be rescheduled?

Assess impact to stockpiles, buildings, assets, vehicles, and equipment:

- Review stockpiles and replenish as appropriate.
- Record decisions and photos and/or videos of damage in an event log and prepare insurance claims.

Recover data and business records, if appropriate.

Arrange a debrief and follow-up sessions with staff as soon as practicable

Activity Support your community

Continue updating the community and reinforcing key messages.

Provide information about where community members can go for material, financial and social support.

Provide mental health and trauma support.

Activity Communication

Advise staff of transition to temporary or normal business and clinical arrangements

Thank staff for their engagement and response

Use social media, websites, phone or email to advise patients, visitors and stakeholders about your business and clinical arrangements.