

EXTREME HEAT

Extreme heat

By AfriForum's Disaster Control Department

There is hot and then there is *hót*. Extreme heat is when the temperature rises over 32°C and continues for more than two days. The humidity can also be high or low. During times like these, your body works overtime to maintain its normal temperature. If the body overheats it can lead to death.

The elderly, children, and sick or overweight people are at a higher risk when it is extremely hot.

Humidity can exacerbate the heat.

Be prepared for a heat wave/ extreme heat

- Be aware of the symptoms of heat-related illnesses by looking for signs such as heat cramps, heat exhaustion and sunstroke.
- Do not try to cool down by only using a fan. Fans provide airflow but do not cool down the body.
- You can visit places like libraries or shopping centres that use air-conditioning.
- Close windows with curtains or shutters.
- Seal doors and windows.
- Use window reflectors to reflect heat away from windows.
- Add insulation in and around the house to keep the heat outside.
- Make sure there are enough water and electrolyte drinks available to drink.

Higher temperatures can create conditions that promote the onset of runaway veld fires:

- Avoid open fires.
- Welding and grinding jobs in open veld areas should be limited, and if it is undertaken there should be firefighting equipment on site.
- Keep personnel and firefighting equipment on standby.
- All other resources should be on standby in case of a wildfire.
- Maintain firebreaks.

Be safe during heat waves/extreme heat

- Never leave any adult, child or pet in a vehicle.
- If you do not have air-conditioning in your house, visit a shopping centre or library to cool down.
- Take cold showers or baths often to cool down your body temperature.
- Wear light colours and cotton fabrics.
- Limit the use of your stove to reduce the heat inside your house.
- If you go outdoors, try working in the shade and wear a wide-rimmed hat to protect your face and neck.
- Ensure an adequate and regular intake of water and electrolytes.
- If possible, avoid exercising or doing any work outside in the midday heat.
- Check in with your family, senior citizens and neighbours on a regular basis to make sure they are OK.
- Be observant about heat cramps, heat exhaustion and sunstroke.
- If your pets are outside, make sure there is adequate shade and cool water to drink. Gravel and dark paving can be too hot for your pet's paws.

Veld fires:

- Report veld fires as soon as possible to your local fire protection association or fire service.
- Give the following information when reporting a veld fire: stand number, street name, nearest intersection, area.
- Make sure the water tanks are full if loadshedding is expected.
- Use your firefighting equipment to put out the fire.
- Make sure the veld fire is extinguished by ensuring the fire line is no longer smouldering.

Summary: Signs and symptoms of heat-related illnesses

1. Heat cramps:

Muscle pains or spasms in the stomach, arms or legs

2. Heat exhaustion:

This is a common heat illness that can lead to sunstroke and can be fatal. It results from the loss of electrolytes – to such an extent that the body goes into shock.

Signs and symptoms

- pale skin
- fast, shallow breathing
- thirst
- alternating state of consequence
- cold, damp skin
- quick and faint pulse
- nausea and vomiting

3. Sunstroke:

This is the most common and dangerous heat emergency. Should such a patient not receive treatment, the condition can be fatal. It happens when the body's cooling system is not able to process a warm environment. This can be attributed to a serious loss of fluid, intense exercise or high humidity combined with a high temperature – which typically happens in endurance sports such as marathons where most of these factors are present.

Signs and symptoms

- dry, warm, red skin
- quick pulse
- dizziness
- vomiting
- a rapid spike in body temperature
- abnormal behaviour
- nausea
- unconsciousness