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| Heat Event Preparedness and Response - Cooler Place Management Operational Guidelines |
| April 2025 |
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| **Heat Event Preparedness and Response – Cooler Place Management Operational Guidelines**  April 2025 |
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| More Information To receive this publication in an accessible format contact [Homes Victoria](mailto:enquiries@homes.vic.gov.au) enquiries@homes.vic.gov.au.  This guideline contains some links to internal resources which will not be accessible for external parties reading this document.  Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.  © State of Victoria, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, April 2025.  **ISBN** 978-1-76130-814-7 **(pdf/online/MS word)**  Available at [Service Providers – Public housing policy and practice manuals](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/public-housing-policy-and-practice-manuals) <https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/public-housing-policy-and-practice-manuals> |
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Contents

[More Information 3](#_Toc194934845)

[2 Revision history 5](#_Toc194934846)

[3 Overview 6](#_Toc194934847)

[3.1 Heat event readiness 6](#_Toc194934848)

[4 Emergency information and warnings 6](#_Toc194934849)

[4.1 Bureau of Meteorology 7](#_Toc194934850)

[4.2 Chief Health Officer 7](#_Toc194934851)

[4.3 VicEmergency 8](#_Toc194934852)

[5 Health and wellbeing 8](#_Toc194934853)

[5.1 Resources for staying safe 8](#_Toc194934854)

[5.2 Alternative cooling options 8](#_Toc194934855)

[6 Facility readiness 8](#_Toc194934856)

[7 Activation of Cooler Places 9](#_Toc194934857)

[7.1 Infection control measures 9](#_Toc194934858)

[7.2 Activation during low-intensity heatwaves 9](#_Toc194934859)

[7.3 Signage 10](#_Toc194934860)

[7.4 Prior booking of facilities 10](#_Toc194934861)

[7.5 Operating hours for third-party facilities 10](#_Toc194934862)

[8 Divisional locations of Cooler Places 10](#_Toc194934863)

[9 Cleaning 10](#_Toc194934864)

# Revision history

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Version | Amended section | Effective | Details |
| 1.0 |  | December 2020 | * First publication |
| 1.1 | Considerations | March 2022 | * Changes around capacity and the need for COVID Marshals |
| 1.2 | Throughout | December 2022 | * Updates made relating to COVID-Safe requirements |
| 1.3 | Throughout | November 2023 | * Updates made relating to triggers to open Cooler Places when Heat health warnings are issued by the Bureau of Meteorology * Removal of COVID-Safe related requirements while keeping some measures to support infection control |
| 1.4 | Throughout | April 2025 | * Operational Guideline rename from "Access to Cooler Places" to "Heat Event Preparedness and Response – Cooler Place Management" to better reflect the scope and focus of the guidelines. * Improved readability score and accessibility through document management. * Restructured and reframed all sections and headers to enhance process flow. * New sections have been added, and existing sections have been extended to provide detailed guidance on:   + Heat event readiness – Public Housings preparedness for heat events under SEMP.   + Emergency information and warnings   + Facility readiness – pre-season inspections and restock of necessary items to maintain operational preparedness.   + Alternative cooling options – Special Accommodation Requirements and Internal/External Works Permit promotion.   + Resources for staying safe   + Divisional locations of Cooler Places |

# Overview

To protect public housing renters during extreme heat events, Homes Victoria has designated over 100 community facilities across Victoria as Cooler Places. This initiative aligns with the State Emergency Management Plan's (SEMP) principle of shared responsibility, which emphasises that emergency management is a collective effort. A Cooler Place is an air-conditioned community facility that provides relief from hot weather. These venues prioritise access for those most at risk, including:

* The elderly
* Individuals with disabilities, and
* Parents with young children.

Children under 16 must be accompanied by an adult to ensure their safety.

## Heat event readiness

Homes Victoria and the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (the department) has several programs aimed at preparing and reducing the impact of heat events on public housing renters. These include:

Table 1: Preparedness in public housing

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Program | Detail |
| Keeping in Touch | This program is designed for public housing renters aged 75 years and over who live alone. It offers a weekly contact service for those who opt-in, providing a safety net and support during periods of extreme weather.  **Program features:**   * **Weekly phone calls:** Participants receive a weekly phone call from the department to check on their health and wellbeing. * **Weather updates:** The calls include notifications about expected hot weather conditions and provide tips on staying cool. * **Welfare check:** If a renter does not respond to the call, the department contacts their Next of Kin. If this is unsuccessful, a welfare check is arranged either through Victoria Police or by a local housing office. |
| Cooler Places | Over 100 air-conditioned community facilities designated across Victoria to provide relief during extreme heat events. Refer to [section 8 Divisional locations of Cooler Places.](#_Divisional_locations_of) |
| Electricity generates | **Installed in high-rise public housing buildings to provide a backup electricity supply during power outages, helping to maintain essential facilities.** |

# Emergency information and warnings

The Victorian [State Emergency Management Plan – Extreme Heat Sub-Plan](https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/responsibilities/state-emergency-management-plan-sub-plans/semp-extreme-heat-sub-plan) <https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/responsibilities/state-emergency-management-plan-sub-plans/semp-extreme-heat-sub-plan> outlines the Department of Health's criteria for issuing heat health warnings. When these criteria are met, appropriate state and local agencies activate their response plans.

To stay informed about health-related emergencies, Client Support and Housing Services (CSHS) Managers and staff overseeing Cooler Places must register for alerts and newsletters at <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/subscribe> and monitor latest warnings.

## Bureau of Meteorology

The Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) operates the Heatwave Service from October to March, with flexibility to respond to early or late heat events. This service provides maps showing low, severe, and extreme heatwaves for the past two three-day periods and forecasts for the next five three-day periods. It gives advance notice of unusually hot conditions, allowing governments, emergency services, businesses, and communities to prepare and mitigate impacts.

A heatwave is a period of high maximum and minimum temperatures lasting for three consecutive days. It involves elevated daytime and overnight temperatures, which hinder recovery from daytime heat.

BoM issues public heatwave warnings when severe or extreme heatwaves are expected to affect at least 10% of a weather district. These warnings are published on the BoMs public channels, including its website and [BOM weather app](http://www.bom.gov.au/app/) <http://www.bom.gov.au/app/>.

The impact of heatwaves can differ greatly depending on their intensity. Below are the various levels of heatwave intensity:

Table 2: Heatwave intensity levels

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Intensity | Frequency | Description |
| Low-Intensity | Most common | Most people can cope with this level of heat. |
| Severe | Less frequent | Poses risks for vulnerable populations, such as the elderly. |
| Extreme | Rare | Poses risks even for healthy individuals, particularly those outdoors. |

A warning includes the:

* Expected maximum and minimum temperatures,
* Timing of when the heatwave will peak or ease, and
* Affected communities within the warning area.

For more information visit [Australia's official weather forecasts & weather radar - Bureau of Meteorology](http://www.bom.gov.au/) <<http://www.bom.gov.au/>>.

## Chief Health Officer

The Chief Health Officer may issue a heat health warning for significant temperature events that don't meet the BoM’s heatwave criteria, such as:

* Short-term high temperatures with significant health effects.
* Severe or extreme heatwave affecting less than ten per cent of a weather district but affecting a large population centre or mass gathering.

More information about heat health warnings can be found at <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/environmental-health/extreme-heat-and-heatwaves>.

## VicEmergency

The [VicEmergency platform](https://www.emergency.vic.gov.au/respond/) <https://www.emergency.vic.gov.au/respond/> uses BoM’s warnings to provide a four-day forecast, displayed on its website and app. As a heatwave approaches (within 12 hours), VicEmergency issues advice messages to affected areas. Warnings may escalate (e.g., to "Watch and Act") based on the event's severity. The platform also issues advice for one-off extreme heat events, as advised by the Department of Health, aligning with the Australian Warning System.

# Health and wellbeing

Extreme heat events can impact anyone, regardless of age or health status. However, certain individuals may be more vulnerable due to factors such as age, pre-existing health conditions, environmental conditions, social and economic circumstances, location, or occupation. These factors can increase the risk of adverse effects from extreme heat.

## Resources for staying safe

The Department of Health's Better Health Channel offers a range of informative resources on how to stay safe during extreme heat events. These resources include the "Survive the Heat" posters and brochures, which are available in multiple formats and languages. Translated versions can be accessed through the [Health Translations website](https://www.healthtranslations.vic.gov.au/advanced-search?q=heat&field_node_resource_topic_name=Heat&field_node_organisation_name=Victorian%20Department%20of%20Health) <https://www.healthtranslations.vic.gov.au/advanced-search?q=heat&field\_node\_resource\_topic\_name=Heat&field\_node\_organisation\_name=Victorian%20Department%20of%20Health>, offering support in numerous community languages.

Local housing areas should leverage these resources to raise awareness on how to stay safe during heatwaves. This can be done by ensuring the resources are readily available at key locations, such as reception areas and Cooler Place locations.

Staff can request printed copies of these resources using the [online order form](http://ewfds.wfds.com.au/ewfds/?th=VHHR&n1=VHHR&n2=VHHR) <http://ewfds.wfds.com.au/ewfds/?th=VHHR&n1=VHHR&n2=VHHR>.

For more detailed guidance on coping with extreme heat, refer to the Better Health Channel's [How to cope and stay safe in extreme heat | Better Health Channel](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/how-to-cope-and-stay-safe-in-extreme-heat) page <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/how-to-cope-and-stay-safe-in-extreme-heat>

## Alternative cooling options

For renters who may not have easy access to Cooler Places, alternative cooling options include:

* **Public facilities:** Libraries, shopping centres, local pools, cinemas
* **Personal networks:** Family and friends’ homes with air conditioning.
* **Internal/External Works Permit:** For renters wishing to install an air conditioner at their own expense.
* **Special Accommodation Requirements:** For renters with medical conditions requiring medical cooling, including air conditioning.

# Facility readiness

As the summer months approach, local housing areas are responsible for ensuring that facilities are ready to provide a safe and comfortable environment for residents during heatwaves. September is an ideal time to conduct necessary preparations to mitigate heat-related risks. Preparation activities must include:

* **Air conditioner inspection:** An inspection of all designated Cooler Places to confirm air conditioning units are functioning efficiently.
* **Hazard identification and risk assessment:** An Occupational Health and Safety check, to identify potential risks within the facility. This includes:
  + **Tripping hazards:** Inspecting walkways and floors for uneven surfaces, loose mats, or other obstructions that could cause slips or falls.
  + **Lighting:** Verifying that all lighting is in good working order to prevent accidents and maintain visibility.
  + **Emergency exits:** Confirming that all emergency exit signs are in good working order and clearly visible at all times.
  + **First aid kits:** Inspecting first aid kits to maintain their stock levels and check for expired items. Replace any used or expired items promptly.
  + **Cleaning product storage:** Verifying that cleaning products are properly labelled and securely stored to prevent unauthorised access or spills.
* **General facility supplies:** Conducting an inventory check and ordering additional supplies as necessary. This includes checking the stock levels of:
  + **Personal Protective Equipment:** Disposable face masks.
  + **Hygiene supplies:** Cups and alcohol wipes.
  + **Cleaning products:** Cleaning products.

# Activation of Cooler Places

Cooler Places should be activated when the Department of Health issues a heat health warning, specifically under the following conditions:

* **Heatwave warnings:** Locations within a weather forecast district facing a Severe or Extreme heatwave risk as per the Bureau of Meteorology's warning.
* **Chief Health Officer alerts**: If the Chief Health Officer identifies a heat health risk, even without a BoM heatwave warning. This can occur during severe heat over one or two consecutive days, with details provided in the warning.

CSHS Managers are responsible for coordinating the opening of Cooler Places once the threshold is reached, and for:

* Notifying relevant Community Facility Managers about the heat health warning.
* Informing the Housing Call Centre at [HCC.leadership@dffh.vic.gov.au](mailto:HCC.leadership@dffh.vic.gov.au) when Cooler Places are open, so renters in the Keeping in Touch program can be informed.

## Infection control measures

When air conditioners are in use, they should be set to maximise outdoor air exchange to minimise air recirculation. If increasing outdoor air exchange is not possible, windows should be opened to promote airflow.

For more information, staff can refer to the Department of Health’s Better Health Chanel, Improving ventilation to stop the spread of COVID-19 page at <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/covid-19/improving-ventilation-stop-spread-covid-19>.

## Activation during low-intensity heatwaves

CSHS Managers may choose to activate Cooler Places based on local conditions during low-intensity heatwaves. For example, a low-intensity heatwave might involve temperatures reaching 28-30°C in areas where 25°C is typical. This is particularly relevant for areas with:

* Elderly residents or
* Families without air conditioning.

Cooler Places can be opened or closed by:

* Community Facility Managers
* Local office staff
* Stand-by officers
* Local community service providers
* Contracted security guards or
* Any other authorised individual.

## Signage

Multilingual signage designating a facility as a Cooler Place should be displayed on doors during heat health warnings. A Cooler Places Facility Alert sign can be found on the [Tenancy and Estate Management](https://dhhsvicgovau.sharepoint.com/sites/Publichousingresources/SitePages/Tenancy-management.aspx) page of the Public Housing Resources SharePoint <https://dhhsvicgovau.sharepoint.com/sites/Publichousingresources/SitePages/Tenancy-management.aspx>.

## Prior booking of facilities

On days with a heat health warning, prior bookings will be deferred to facilitate the opening of Cooler Places. On these days, staff or Community Facility Managers will:

* Inform organisations of deferred bookings and
* Offer alternative locations if available.

## Operating hours for third-party facilities

During extreme weather events, prioritising effective management of facilities is essential. CSHS Managers must work with Community Facility Managers to establish operating hours based on the weather. If temperatures remain excessive at 7:00 PM, Community Facility Managers are encouraged to keep the facility open as late as possible.

# Divisional locations of Cooler Places

Cooler Places are designated across various divisions and areas. As of April 2025, Cooler Places are available in the following regions:

Table 3: Divisional locations of Cooler Places

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Division | Area |
| North | Mallee, Loddon, North Easten Melbourne Area, Hume Merri-Bek |
| South | Bayside Peninsula Area, Southern Melbourne Area, Inner Gippsland Area |
| East | Box Hill, Ovens Murray, Outer Eastern Melbourne Area, Goulburn |
| West | Barwon, Wimmera, Western Melbourne, Central Highlands Area |

# Cleaning

Facilities should be cleaned at the end of each business day after use as Cooler Places. In high-rise buildings with existing cleaning contracts, those contracts should be utilised. If no contract exists, cleaning will need to be independently arranged.

Cleaning should adhere to the Community Facility Cleaning Schedule, available on the [Tenancy and Estate Management](https://dhhsvicgovau.sharepoint.com/sites/Publichousingresources/SitePages/Tenancy-management.aspx) page of the Public Housing Resources SharePoint <https://dhhsvicgovau.sharepoint.com/sites/Publichousingresources/SitePages/Tenancy-management.aspx>.

Local decisions can be made about the completion of the full cleaning schedule based on usage levels as Cooler Places.