

# Unhealthy Heat Community Action Toolkit

TO HELP  
YOU KEEP YOUR  
FRIENDS, FAMILY AND  
COMMUNITY SAFE  
FROM **UNHEALTHY  
HEAT!**



## KICK THE HEAT

Massachusetts Department  
of Public Health



## Introduction

Unhealthy heat is a growing public health concern in Massachusetts. Hot days and heat waves can make people sick. They can worsen health problems and raise the risk of [heat-related illnesses](#). Heat can be particularly hazardous during the first heat wave of the season. This is when people's bodies haven't yet adjusted to higher temperatures.

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health's [Bureau of Climate and Environmental Health](#) and the Division of Community Engagement created this toolkit. It aims to help community members, local leaders, and others raise awareness about unhealthy heat. This includes schools, libraries, faith-based organizations, and community groups.

This toolkit has key messages, outreach ideas, social media content, and sample language. You can use or adapt these for local audiences. The goal is to help partners share clear, consistent, and practical information before and during periods of unhealthy heat.

Community members and leaders can use this toolkit to:

- Raise awareness about unhealthy heat and [heat-related illness](#)
- Encourage people to check the [Massachusetts Unhealthy Heat Forecast page](#)
- Promote cooling resources and local support services
- Encourage neighbors, families, and community groups to check on people who may need help
- Share simple steps people can take to stay cool, hydrated, and safe



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## 1. Key facts and messages

Topic	Key message
<b>Unhealthy heat can make people sick</b>	Heat can cause dehydration, heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke. Heat stroke is a medical emergency.
<b>The first heat wave can be especially dangerous</b>	People’s bodies need time to adjust to higher temperatures. Early-season heat can catch people off guard.
<b>Some people face higher risk</b>	Older adults, young children, pregnant people, people with medical conditions or disabilities, outdoor workers, athletes, and people without housing may need extra support.
<b>Community check-ins help</b>	A call, text, knock on the door, or quick visit can help identify someone who needs cooling, water, or medical attention.
<b>Cooling matters</b>	Spending even a few hours in air conditioning can help reduce the risk of heat-related illness.
<b>Hydration matters</b>	People should drink more fluids than usual during hot weather, even before they feel thirsty.
<b>Heat can affect medicines and medical equipment</b>	People who rely on medications, refrigerated medicine, or electricity-powered medical equipment should plan ahead for heat and power outages.
<b>Outdoor events need a heat plan</b>	Shade, water, cooling breaks, weather monitoring, and access to cooling spaces can help keep people safe.
<b>Heat can overlap with other hazards</b>	Hot weather can coincide with poor air quality, thunderstorms, lightning, wildfires, and power outages.
<b>Local resources are important. Spread the word.</b>	Community members can call 2-1-1 or check local information for cooling centers, libraries, senior centers, pools, splash pads, and other cooling options.

## 2. Outreach activities

### Use social media

Social media is one of the easiest ways to share unhealthy heat information quickly. Partners can post heat safety tips before and during hot weather and share links to trusted public health resources.

Suggested topics include:

- When unhealthy heat is forecast
- How to stay cool and hydrated
- Who is more likely to get sick from heat
- How to check on neighbors and family members
- Where to find local cooling resources
- How to recognize the sign and symptoms of heat-related illness and actions to take
- Heat safety during outdoor events, sports, work, and travel

Partners should consider posting several times during a heat wave, especially when a Community Heat Alert or local heat advisory is active.

### Partner with community organizations

Community organizations are trusted messengers and can help reach residents who may not follow state or local government channels.

Potential partners include:

- Senior centers
- Libraries
- Schools and parent groups
- Faith-based organizations
- Community health centers
- Housing organizations
- Food pantries
- Youth programs
- Disability service organizations
- Immigrant and refugee support organizations
- Local businesses
- Sports leagues and recreation programs



### Suggested activities:

- Ask partners to include heat safety messages in newsletters
- Share graphics and posts for partners to repost
- Provide short blurbs for partner websites
- Ask partners to display flyers in high-traffic areas
- Encourage community groups to organize check-ins during heat waves
- Share information in multiple languages when available

### Promote cooling resources

During unhealthy heat, people may need help finding a cool place to go. Community partners can help residents identify cooling options before the hottest part of the day.

### Suggested activities:

- Promote 2-1-1 as a way to find cooling resources
- Develop and share local cooling center information
- Promote libraries, senior centers, community centers, malls, pools, and splash pads
- Encourage residents to make personal cooling plans
- Help people plan transportation to cooling locations
- Remind people that spending even a few hours in air conditioning can help

### Work with local media

Local media can help raise awareness before and during heat waves.

### Suggested activities:

- Send a short heat safety advisory to local newspapers, radio stations, and community newsletters
- Offer a local spokesperson to discuss heat safety
- Share information about local cooling centers information
- Promote the Massachusetts Unhealthy Heat Forecast
- Encourage media outlets to remind residents to check on neighbors and family members

### Promote Heat Safety at Workplaces

Employers and workplace leaders can help protect staff during hot weather, especially workers who spend time outdoors, in vehicles, in kitchens, or in hot indoor environments.

### Suggested activities:

- Share heat safety reminders by email
- Post flyers in break rooms and common areas



- Encourage water breaks and cooling breaks
- Adjust outdoor work schedules when possible
- Remind staff to watch for signs of heat-related illness
- Understand and share information about who is more vulnerable to heat related illness, older adults, people who are pregnant, people with chronic medical conditions like diabetes or heart conditions, and people who work outdoors or in hot indoor environments
- Encourage managers to check on staff during periods of unhealthy heat

## Support safe summer events

Large gatherings, outdoor events, watch parties, parades, festivals, and sports activities should include heat safety planning.

### Suggested planning steps:

- Provide free drinking water or clearly identify where water is available
- Create shaded areas with tents, umbrellas, canopies, or shade sails
- Identify cooling spaces before the event
- Plan for cooling breaks
- Monitor weather, heat, air quality, and thunderstorms
- Share heat safety messages before and during the event
- Train staff and volunteers to recognize signs of heat-related illness and actions to take
- Have a plan for medical emergencies and severe weather



## 3. Social media tips

### Keep messages simple

Use short, direct language. People often skim social media posts, especially during emergency or weather-related events.

### Include a clear action

Each post should tell people what to do. Examples:

- Check the forecast
- Drink fluids
- Find a cool place
- Check on a neighbor
- Call 911 for signs of heat stroke
- Call 2-1-1 for cooling resources

### Use images or graphics

Posts with images are more likely to get attention. Use graphics that are easy to read and accessible. Avoid placing too much text in the image. We have included links to pre-made graphics you can download and share in the kit below.

Be sure to include ALT text when posting images. ALT text is a brief written description of an image for people who use assistive technology such as screen-reading devices. [Learn more about all text.](#)

### Use plain language



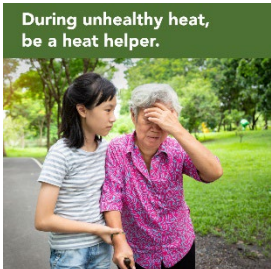

Use plain language and avoid jargon.




### Time posts strategically



Post before heat arrives, during the hottest days, and when local cooling resources are available. Early-season messaging is especially important.



## 4. Sample social media posts

Theme	Social media text	Image download	Image ALT text
Unhealthy heat forecast	<p>Unhealthy heat is on the way. Check the Massachusetts Unhealthy Heat Forecast, make a plan, and share heat safety tips with neighbors, family, and friends. <a href="https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-unhealthy-heat-forecast">https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-unhealthy-heat-forecast</a> #BeatTheHeat</p>	 <p>Download <a href="#">the first is the worst image</a>.</p>	<p>Cartoon sun character in soccer clothes sweating beside a high thermometer with the text, “First is the worst. When the first heat wave hits, keep cool and stay safe.”</p>
First heat wave	<p>The first heat wave can be the most dangerous. Bodies need time to adjust. Plan ahead: drink fluids, find cool places, and check on people who may need help. <a href="https://www.mass.gov/extreme-heat">https://www.mass.gov/extreme-heat</a> #BeatTheHeat</p>	 <p>Download <a href="#">the Unhealthy Heat Forecast image</a>.</p>	<p>Thermometer in front of a city skyline with the text, “Unhealthy heat is on the way. Check the forecast.”</p>
Heat helper	<p>Be a heat ‘helper’. During hot weather, call, text, or visit older adults, people living alone, families with young children, and neighbors without air conditioning. A quick check-in can make a difference. <a href="https://www.mass.gov/extreme-heat">https://www.mass.gov/extreme-heat</a> #BeatTheHeat</p>	 <p>Download <a href="#">the be a heat helper image</a>.</p>	<p>Young person helping an older adult who appears overheated while outside, with the text, “During unhealthy heat, be a heat helper.”</p>
Who is at higher risk	<p>Know who is more likely to get sick from heat: older adults, young children, pregnant people, outdoor workers, athletes, people without housing, and people with medical conditions or disabilities. <a href="https://www.mass.gov/extreme-heat">https://www.mass.gov/extreme-heat</a> #BeatTheHeat</p>	 <p>Download <a href="#">the heat vulnerable populations image</a>.</p>	<p>Four images showing people who may face higher risk during unhealthy heat, including an older adult, a child, an outdoor worker, and a farm worker.</p>

Theme	Social media text	Image download	Image ALT text
Heat illness	Heat illness can become an emergency. Watch for dizziness, nausea, heavy sweating, confusion, or fainting. Call 911 you think someone is having a heat stroke. <a href="https://www.mass.gov/info-details/prevent-and-treat-heat-related-illness">https://www.mass.gov/info-details/prevent-and-treat-heat-related-illness</a> #BeatTheHeat	 <p>Download <a href="#">the heat-related illness image</a>.</p>	Illustration of people helping someone who appears dizzy and overheated at the beach, with the text, “Act fast against heat related illness (HRI).”
Hydration	Hydration matters during unhealthy heat. Drink more fluids (water or electrolyte replacement drinks), even if you don’t feel thirsty. Avoid drinks with alcohol, caffeine, and sugar. <a href="https://www.mass.gov/extreme-heat">https://www.mass.gov/extreme-heat</a> #BeatTheHeat	 <p>Download <a href="#">the drink more fluids image</a>.</p>	Cartoon sun character drinking from a water bottle while holding a clipboard, with the text, “Drink more fluids during unhealthy heat.”
Cooling resources	Need a cool place? Call 2-1-1 or check local resources for cooling centers, libraries, senior centers, splash pads, pools, and other places to cool off during a heat wave. <a href="https://www.mass.gov/extreme-heat">https://www.mass.gov/extreme-heat</a> #BeatTheHeat	 <p>Download <a href="#">the seek shade image</a>.</p>	Pregnant woman and child sitting in the shade under an umbrella and reading, with the text, “Seek shade or find a cool spot during unhealthy heat.”
Events and watch parties	Planning a summer event or watch party? Add shade, drinking water, cooling breaks, and a weather plan. Heat safety helps everyone celebrate safely. <a href="https://www.mass.gov/extreme-heat">https://www.mass.gov/extreme-heat</a> #BeatTheHeat	 <p>Download <a href="#">the summer event planning image</a>.</p>	Crowd of soccer fans cheering outdoors with the text, “Stay safe from unhealthy heat during summer events.”

Theme	Social media text	Image download	Image ALT text
Outdoor workers	Working outside during unhealthy heat can be dangerous. Drink fluids often, take breaks, use shade when possible, and watch for signs of heat illness. <a href="https://www.mass.gov/extreme-heat">https://www.mass.gov/extreme-heat</a> #BeatTheHeat	 <p>Learn about outdoor worker safety during hot and humid weather</p> <p>Download <a href="#">the outdoor worker image</a>.</p>	Farm workers in a field with an inset image of an outdoor worker in safety gear, with the text, “Learn about workplace safety during hot and humid weather.”
Medicine and power outages	Some medicines and medical devices require extra planning during periods of unhealthy heat. Ask a doctor or pharmacist how to store medicine and plan ahead for power outages. <a href="https://www.mass.gov/extreme-heat">https://www.mass.gov/extreme-heat</a> #BeatTheHeat	 <p>Keep medicine safe in extreme heat</p> <p>Download <a href="#">the monitor medications in the heat image</a>.</p>	Older adult using an inhaler outdoors with an inset image of a health care worker speaking with a patient, with the text, “Keep medicine safe in the heat.”

## 5. Sample newsletter or email blurb

### Option 1: Short Blurb

Unhealthy heat can make people sick, especially older adults, young children, pregnant people, outdoor workers, athletes, people with medical conditions or disabilities, and people without access to air conditioning, especially people who live alone. Check the [Massachusetts Unhealthy Heat Forecast](#), make a heat emergency plan to stay cool, and check on neighbors, family, and friends during hot weather.

### Option 2: Longer Blurb

As temperatures rise, unhealthy heat can increase the risk of dehydration, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke. The first heat wave of the season can be especially dangerous because our bodies need time to adjust to higher temperatures. Community members can help by checking the [Massachusetts Unhealthy Heat Forecast](#), identifying cool places to go, drinking more fluids than usual, and checking on people who may need extra support. During a heat wave, call 2-1-1 or check local resources for cooling centers, libraries, senior centers, pools, splash pads, and other cooling options.

## 6. Health equity and unhealthy heat

Unhealthy heat does not affect all communities equally. Some people and neighborhoods are at higher heat risk, because of older housing, limited air conditioning, and little shade. Residents in these same communities also tend to have more chronic health issues, transportation problems, and tougher working conditions. Language barriers and limited access to health care and cooling resources add to the risks.





Community outreach can lower these risks. It ensures that trusted information gets to those who need it most. Local leaders, community organizations, faith-based groups, libraries, senior centers, schools, housing partners, and public health agencies can help connect residents with cooling resources and practical steps to stay safe.



When planning heat outreach, consider:

- Providing information in multiple languages.
- Sharing messages through trusted community partners.
- Promoting cooling resources that are accessible by public transportation.
- Reaching people who may not use social media or email.
- Including people with disabilities, mobility issues, and people who use medical equipment in planning.
- Coordinating with housing, aging services, schools, recreation programs, and emergency management.
- Using plain language and accessible formats.



## 7. Resources

Resource	Description	QR code and link
Massachusetts Unhealthy Heat Forecast	A 7-day forecast tool tracks daily and weekly levels of heat in the state and notifies you when an Unhealthy Heat Alert is active. Use this tool to plan, take protective action, share timely information with others in your community, and stay ahead of rising temperatures.	 <a href="https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-unhealthy-heat-forecast">Unhealthy Heat Forecast</a> <a href="https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-unhealthy-heat-forecast">https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-unhealthy-heat-forecast</a>
Community heat alert signup	Sign up to receive email alerts and updates from the Division of Community Engagement (DCE) to get timely email updates when unhealthy heat is forecasted, along with practical tips and shareable resources to help you protect your community.	 <a href="https://www.mass.gov/forms/dce-alerts-and-updates">DCE Alerts and Updates</a> <a href="https://www.mass.gov/forms/dce-alerts-and-updates">https://www.mass.gov/forms/dce-alerts-and-updates</a>
Extreme heat resources	Explore a curated collection of guides, data tools, safety tips, and planning resources to help communities, agencies, and individuals across Massachusetts <b>understand, prepare for, and respond to periods of extreme heat.</b>	 <a href="https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-unhealthy-heat-forecast">Extreme heat resources</a> <a href="https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-unhealthy-heat-forecast">https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-unhealthy-heat-forecast</a>
Prevent and Treat Heat-Related Illness	Signs, symptoms, and actions to take for heat cramps, exhaustion, and heat stroke.	 <a href="https://www.mass.gov/info-details/prevent-and-treat-heat-related-illness">Prevent and Treat Heat-Related Illness</a> <a href="https://www.mass.gov/info-details/prevent-and-treat-heat-related-illness">https://www.mass.gov/info-details/prevent-and-treat-heat-related-illness</a>

<p>Celebrate safely to protect your health during the World Cup</p>	<p>Are you going to World Cup matches and celebrations this summer? Use these tips to stay healthy and find care when you need it.</p>	 <p><a href="https://www.mass.gov/info-details/celebrate-safely-to-protect-your-health-during-the-world-cup">Celebrate safely to protect your health during the World Cup</a>  <a href="https://www.mass.gov/info-details/celebrate-safely-to-protect-your-health-during-the-world-cup">https://www.mass.gov/info-details/celebrate-safely-to-protect-your-health-during-the-world-cup</a></p>
<p>Interactive Beach Water Quality Dashboard</p>	<p>DPH's Interactive Beaches Dashboard provides water quality testing results for the current beach season. It will tell you which beaches are open or closed. If a beach is closed, do not swim or enter the water at that location to avoid risk of illness.</p>	 <p><a href="https://www.mass.gov/info-details/interactive-beach-water-quality-dashboard">Interactive Beach Water Quality Dashboard</a>  <a href="https://www.mass.gov/info-details/interactive-beach-water-quality-dashboard">https://www.mass.gov/info-details/interactive-beach-water-quality-dashboard</a></p>