

This resource provides guidance for communities to operate cooling centers and take other actions to help prevent health impacts caused by hot weather.



What is a community cooling center?

In Vermont, heat-related illnesses occur more frequently when temperatures reach the mid-to-upper 80s and hotter. Community cooling centers help provide temporary relief and are especially helpful when the National Weather Service issues a Heat Advisory or Excessive Heat Warning.

Cooling centers can be established in any air-conditioned building that can be opened to the public, such as a library, town hall, or senior center. Private buildings including movie theaters and retail facilities can also be used as cooling centers. The following are common characteristics for community cooling centers:

Recommended	Encouraged
Air-conditioned	Back-up generator available
Accessible to the public	Activities available for guests
American Disabilities Act compliant	Separate room for families and children
Access to restrooms	Public transit / other transportation assistance available
Access to water	Provisions for pets
Seating available for all guests	Extended hours as needed
Widely advertised throughout community	On-site health and social services

If you plan to open a cooling center in your community, please coordinate with your local [Emergency Management Director](#) for further guidance. You can request volunteer assistance to help staff a cooling center through your local [Medical Reserve Corps](#) unit or [health office](#). Find more information about [community cooling centers](#).

As of June 14, 2021 there are no state COVID-19 restrictions or requirements. The Vermont Department of Health has [COVID-19 prevention steps](#) that Vermonters can choose to follow, especially if they or their children are not vaccinated or only had their first dose. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention provided [interim guidance for COVID-19 and Cooling Centers](#) in April 2020 and [interim guidance for fully vaccinated people](#) in May 2021.



What else can be done to prevent heat illnesses?

Check the general [heat safety tips](#) for preventing heat illnesses, which are available in 12 languages. Communities can take additional steps, including:

- Communicate heat safety tips to community residents, including guidance for staying safe in homes without air conditioning. Find example outreach messages in our [Hot Weather Media Toolkit](#).
- Mobilize local care networks to check on people at high risk for heat illness.
- Encourage use of public parks, pools, water bodies, or other outdoor assets that can provide relief during hot weather. Consider reducing or removing entry fees for anyone that needs assistance.
- Set up shade structures, hose/misting stations, and provide bottled water in parts of the community without convenient access to cooling resources.
- For outdoor work, recreational activities, or other local events, ensure that organizers are prepared with water, cooling strategies, and event modification or cancellation plans.

Long-term, communities can support the following strategies:

- Adopt hot weather emergency preparedness and response plans.
- Increase trees, shrubs, and other vegetative cover while reducing paved surfaces to keep urbanized areas cooler.
- Promote energy-efficient building retrofits and design, including weatherization, installation of efficient cooling devices like heat pumps, and use of cool roof and paving materials.

Questions?

Contact ClimateHealth@vermont.gov with questions about cooling centers or other heat illness prevention strategies.