

This resource provides guidance for operating community cooling centers while following COVID-19 safety guidelines.



## 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. Find more information about [community cooling centers](#).



## What COVID-19 guidance should be followed for cooling centers?

The Centers for Disease Control provides guidance for [COVID-19 and Cooling Centers](#).

Follow the Vermont Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) [COVID-19 health and safety guidance](#).

Recommendations include:

- **Consider alternatives to indoor cooling centers**, such as promoting outdoor cooling in shaded spaces and water bodies or assisting residents to stay cool at home.
- **Designate an on-site health officer** to review safety guidelines and ensure safe operations.
- **Display safety posters** and provide [info sheets about COVID-19 prevention](#).
- **Screen staff and guests** using temperature checks and a verbal questionnaire for COVID-19 symptoms and recent exposure to individuals with diagnosed COVID-19. Individuals with a fever or symptoms should contact their health care provider for further guidance. Be prepared to call for emergency medical assistance if guests fail screening and are experiencing severe heat illness symptoms. Provide them with water and access to outdoor shade if reasonably safe to do so.
- **Keep a log of staff and guests** for at least 30 days, including contact information, in the event contact tracing is required by the Health Department.
- **Require masks for staff**, which must cover their nose and mouth.
- **Encourage or require masks for guests**. If possible, make masks available upon entry.
- **Ensure guests maintain a 6-foot distance** between individuals from different households.
- **Limit occupancy** at least in accordance with [ACCD guidelines](#) or as needed to ensure safe distancing in every occupied room.
- **Clean and disinfect commonly used surfaces** before opening, regularly during operation, and after closing the cooling center, including tables, doorknobs, toilets, and handwashing facilities. Limit sharing of any items and clean/disinfect items between uses.
- **Provide soap and/or hand sanitizer** in bathrooms and occupied rooms. Make sure the hand sanitizer contains at least 60% alcohol.
- **Provide bottled water** to guests and/or make water accessible through safe, no-touch means.
- **Maximize ventilation and air filtration** using the HVAC system, ventilation fans, and air filtration devices. Avoid air recirculation as much as possible.



## 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.
- Mobilize local care networks to check on people at high risk for heat illness. If conducting in-person safety checks, be sure to keep a 6-foot distance from other people and wear a cloth face mask or covering.
- 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. Follow the [Outdoor Recreation and COVID-19](#) guidance from the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks, and Recreation.
- Set up shade structures and provide bottled water in parts of the community without convenient access to cool outdoor resources.

Long-term, communities can support the following strategies:

- 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](mailto:ClimateHealth@vermont.gov) with questions about cooling centers or other heat illness prevention strategies.

Contact [AHS.VDHPublicCommunication@vermont.gov](mailto:AHS.VDHPublicCommunication@vermont.gov) with questions about COVID-19 safety guidance.