

Playing Outdoors during Smog Events and Heat Warnings

Outdoor physical activity builds strong hearts and healthy bodies, but can present health concerns for children during summer smog or Heat Warnings.

Children can be quite vulnerable to air pollution because their lungs are still developing. They can also be exposed to greater levels of air pollution than adults because they are so active and breathe faster than adults. Air pollution can make asthma symptoms worse, produce breathing difficulties, increase respiratory infections, decrease lung function, and potentially lead to long-term lung damage.

Infants and very young children are also more vulnerable to high heat than healthy young and middle-aged adults. Heat can stress the heart and lungs as the body works harder to cool itself, and can produce cramps, headaches, nausea, weakness, dizziness, and fainting - if untreated, more serious, permanent damage or death.

During a smog event, it is recommended that caretakers:

- Schedule outdoor activities early in the day during summer months before air pollution increases.
- Plan activities away from high traffic areas, especially during morning peaks and afternoon rush hours.
- Reduce outdoor activity levels by choosing less vigorous activities or reducing their duration.
- Provide children with plenty of rest breaks and a wide variety of quiet activities.
- Monitor children's comfort regularly. If children experience symptoms such as coughing, wheezing, chest tightness and/or difficulty breathing, reduce outdoor activity, move children inside, preferably to an air conditioned environment, and seek medical attention if needed.

- Pay close attention to children who have pre-existing health conditions such as asthma.

During a heat warning or extended heat warning, it is recommended that caretakers:

- Schedule outdoor activities early in the day before temperatures rise.
- Dress children in loose-fitting, light- coloured clothing.
- Ensure that children wear a wide brim hat and use sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher.
- Keep children out of the sun between the hours of 11:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. when UV rays are strongest.
- Reduce outdoor activity levels by choosing less vigorous activities.
- Provide rest breaks and a wide variety of quiet activities, including water-play, in shaded areas.
- Provide plenty of drinking water for both children and staff.
- Monitor children's comfort regularly. If children experience symptoms such as rapid breathing, weakness, headache or nausea, move them into a cool space and seek medical attention if needed.
- Never leave a child unattended in a car.