Health Indicator Report

Heat-Related Illness

Background

The purpose of this health indicator report is to provide information on the level of public awareness, among adults aged 18 and over living in Halton Region, of heat-related illness risk in certain population groups. Some of the groups of people at a greater risk for heat-related illness include older adults, infants and young children, people taking medications for mental health conditions such as antidepressants, people with chronic illnesses, and people with lower incomes.[1] Additionally, the report provides information on the level of access to protective equipment (i.e. air conditioning) and adoption of protective behaviours during very hot days in the summer.

Heat-related illness occurs when a person's body temperature rises quickly and sweating is not enough to cool the body down.[2] Symptoms of heat-related illness include dizziness or fainting, nausea or vomiting, headache, rapid breathing and heartbeat, extreme thirst, and decreased urination with dark yellow urine.[2] There are many ways to prevent heat-related illness, including using a fan or air conditioner, drinking plenty of cool water, using a hat or umbrella to avoid sun exposure, rescheduling outdoor activities, limiting use of the oven, closing blinds or curtains, wearing loose fitting and light coloured clothing, and cooling off with a wet towel, bath or cool shower. For more information visit Halton.ca.

This health indicator report uses data from the Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System (RRFSS).

Awareness

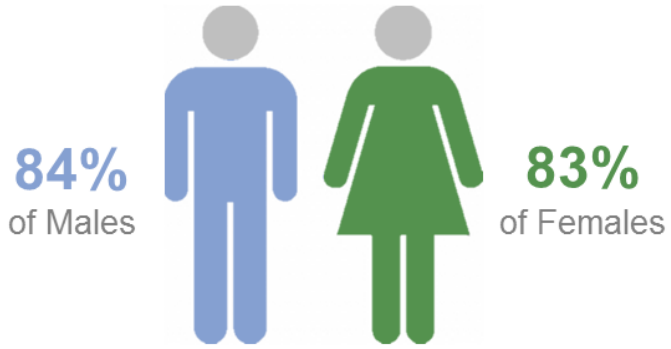
Overall Findings

In 2016, 83% of Halton adults believed that heat-related illness can be prevented, 3% did not believe it can be prevented and 13% did not know whether it can be prevented.

Percentage of adults aged 18 and over who believed that heat-related illness can be prevented, Halton Region, 2016

Sex

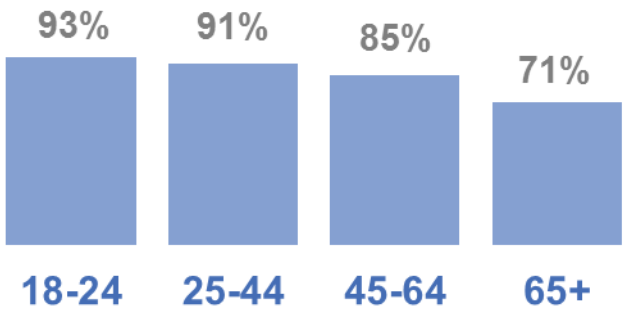
In 2016, there was no statistically significant difference by sex in the percentage of Halton adults who believed that heat-related illness can be prevented.



Percentage of adults aged 18 and over who believed that heat-related illness can be prevented, by sex, Halton Region, 2016

Age

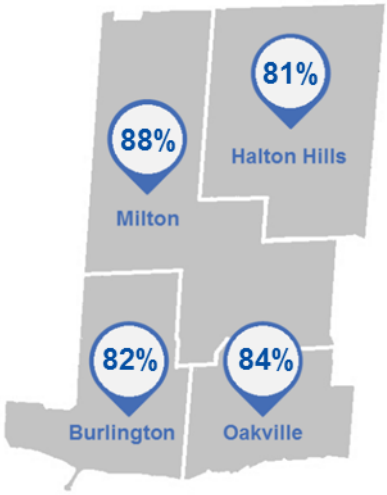
In 2016, the percentage of Halton adults who believed that heat-related illness can be prevented decreased as age increased. This difference was **statistically significant** when comparing adults aged 65+ to each of the other age groups.



Percentage of adults aged 18 and over who believed that heat-related illness can be prevented, by age, Halton Region, 2016

Municipality

In 2016, there were no statistically significant differences by municipality in the percentage of Halton adults who believed that heat-related illness can be prevented.



Percentage of adults aged 18 and over who believed that heat-related illness can be prevented, by municipality, Halton Region, 2016

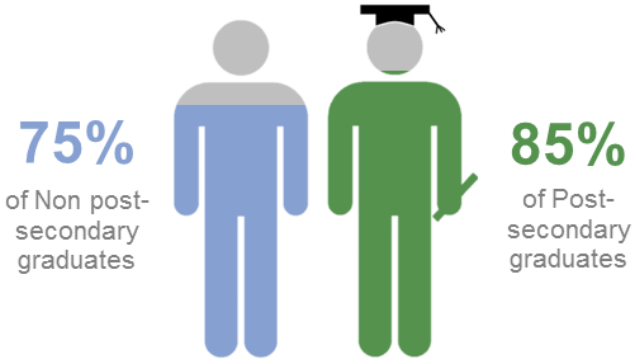
Income

In 2016, the percentage of Halton adults who believed that heat-related illness can be prevented increased as income increased. This difference was **statistically significant** when comparing adults in the high income group to adults in the low income group.

Percentage of adults aged 18 and over who believed that heat-related illness can be prevented, by income, Halton Region, 2016

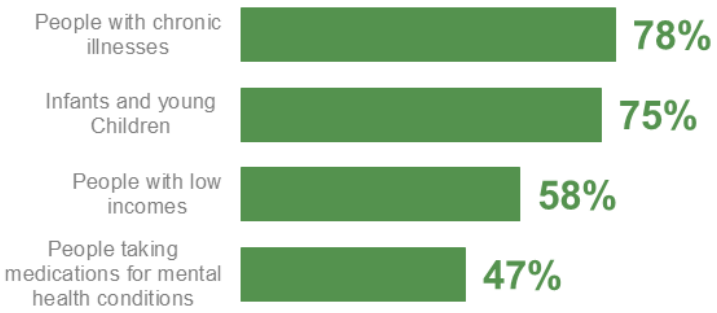
Education

In 2016, the percentage of Halton adults who believed that heat-related illness can be prevented was higher among those who were post-secondary graduates compared to those who were not post-secondary graduates. This difference was **statistically significant**.



Percentage of adults aged 25 and over who believed that heat-related illness can be prevented, by education, Halton Region, 2016

Awareness of High Risk Populations



Percentage of adults aged 18 and over who believed that certain populations were at a greater risk of heat-related illness, Halton Region, 2016

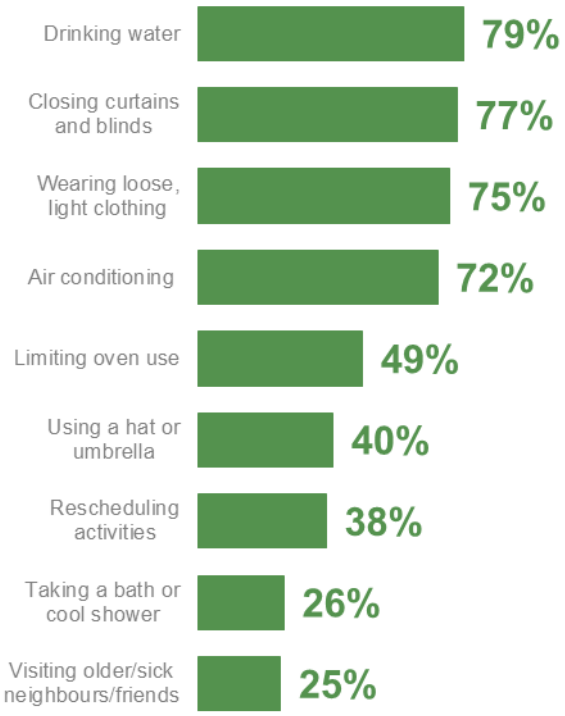
In 2016, Halton adults reported on whether they believed the following populations were at greater risk of heat-related illness:

- 78% believed that people with chronic illnesses are at a greater risk of heat-related illness compared to those without chronic illnesses
- 75% believed that infants and young children are at a greater risk of heat-related illness compared to adults
- 58% believed that people with low incomes are at a greater risk of heat-related illness compared to people with high incomes, and
- 47% believed that people taking medications for mental health conditions are at a greater risk of heat-related illness compared to those who are not taking medications for mental health conditions

Protective Behaviours

In 2016, Halton adults reported always or often participating in the following recommended behaviours on very hot days in the summer to protect themselves from heat-related illness:

- 79% drank more water than usual
- 77% closed curtains or blinds
- 75% wore loose fitting and light coloured clothing
- 72% spent time in an air conditioned environment
- 49% limited the use of their oven
- 40% shaded themselves using a hat or umbrella
- 38% rescheduled outdoor activities
- 26% cooled off with a wet towel, bath, or cool shower
- 25% visited older or sick neighbors, friends, or family members



Percentage of adults aged 18 and over who participated in recommended behaviours to protect themselves from heat-related illness, by type of protective behaviour, Halton Region, 2016

Protective Equipment

In 2016, 96% of Halton adults reported having an air conditioner in their home, and 3%* reported that they did not have an air conditioner, but had a portable or ceiling fan in their home. It was not possible to report on the percentage of residents who did not have either an air conditioner or a fan due to small sample size.

Percentage of adults aged 18 and over who reported having an air conditioner or fan in their home, Halton Region, 2016

Data Notes

For more information on RRFSS, methods, statistical significance and limitations associated with health indicator reports, please see the Data Notes and Guide available at halton.ca.

Definitions: Air conditioner includes all types such as central air, and wall and window units.

Data Source: Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System [2016], Halton Region Health Department and Institute for Social Research, York University.

Limitations: This report only examined a small number of groups of people who may be at a higher risk of heat-related illness than the general public. Other examples of those who may be at a greater risk of heat-related illness who were not addressed I this report include (but are not limited to) outdoor workers and people who exercise outdoors.

Estimates marked with an asterisk (*) should be interpreted with caution due to high variability.

References

1. Health Canada. 2012. Heat Alert and Response Systems to Protect Health: Best Practices Guidebook. Accessed July 2017 from https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/hc-sc/migration/hc-sc/ewh-semt/alt_formats/pdf/pubs/climat/response-intervention/response-intervention-eng.pdf.
2. Halton Region. Heat Warning. Accessed July 2017 from http://www.halton.ca/cms/One.aspx?portalId=8310&pageId=13692#Q4.

For more health indicator and health status reports, visit the Halton Health Statistics website at halton.ca.

Last Revised: July 19th, 2017