

THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF YORK

2024 Heat Relief Strategy for People Experiencing Homelessness

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1.0 Introduction

The Regional Municipality of York is committed to fostering welcoming and inclusive communities where people have access to the services they need. To provide supports for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, York Region partners with service providers to deliver programs, supports and services using a person-centered, equitable and collaborative approach.

1.1 Purpose of the Strategy

York Region's Heat Relief Strategy for People Experiencing Homelessness provides information on how people can access supports and services during the hot weather season.

The 2024 Heat Relief Strategy is in effect from July 1 to September 30, 2024, although there may be occasions where periods of extreme heat fall outside of this date range. The strategy includes:

- Advising partners and members of the public that extreme hot weather conditions and/or high humidity are expected or currently exist
- Providing information about additional supports and services available for people experiencing homelessness during the hot weather season
- Distributing supplies to help reduce the effects of extreme heat for people experiencing homelessness who are unsheltered
- Collaborating with service providers to expand access to supports
- Opening emergency housing overflow beds

1.2 Extreme Heat and Homelessness

People experiencing homelessness are disproportionately vulnerable to adverse health effects of extreme heat compared to the general population. This increased risk is due to a combination of factors, including:

- Increased time spent outdoors
- Limited or no access to protective measures and supplies, such as sunscreen and shade
- Reliance on active travel, such as walking long distances outdoors
- Inadequate access to water
- Malnourishment
- Pre-existing conditions, such as physical or mental illness or substance use
- Clustering in urban cores, which can result in exposure to higher temperatures

Extreme heat is of particular concern for people experiencing homelessness, especially individuals who do not have access to shelter or cool spaces, because the effects of heat exposure are cumulative. The risk of illness due to heat exposure grows with each successive day without cooling. Warm overnight temperatures may worsen health effects due to limited recovery time from daytime heat.

While the impact of extreme heat can be deadly, there are ways to prevent and reduce negative health outcomes during extreme heat, such as warning the public of extreme heat, distribution of educational materials, distribution of supplies (such as water, hats and sunscreen), and access to cool, indoor

spaces. For more information on the effects of extreme heat, including symptoms and treatment for heat exhaustion and heat stroke, visit york.ca/ExtremeHeat

1.3 Temperature Thresholds for Extreme Heat

Extreme heat is defined as a period of very high temperatures, typically accompanied by high humidity and lack of nighttime cooling.

In 2016, Public Health Units across Ontario collaborated with the federal and provincial governments to develop and broadly implement a province-wide [Heat Warning Information System \(HWIS\)](#). The HWIS provides a consistent, evidence-based approach to notify the public of heat warnings in Ontario. Heat warning criteria were developed based on the relationship between mortality, air temperature and/or humidex, along with other key factors such as air pollution, climate and population characteristics.

Heat Warnings and Extended Heat Warnings are issued within York Region based on the following criteria:

Level	Criteria	Duration
Special Weather Statement	First heat event of the season up until the Canada Day weekend, at the discretion of Environment and Climate Change Canada, when heat warning criteria is not reached	No defined duration
Heat Warning	Temperatures are expected to be 31°C or higher <i>and</i> overnight temperatures are expected to be 20°C or higher <i>or</i> Humidex is at least 40	Two days
Extended Heat Warning	Temperatures are expected to be 31°C or higher <i>and</i> overnight temperatures are expected to be 20°C or higher <i>or</i> Humidex is at least 40	Three or more days

Based on the above criteria, York Region Public Health provides communications to partners and the public through email, social media and news stories. Many neighbouring Public Health Units use the same thresholds as York Region Public Health, including Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit, City of Toronto, Peel Region, Durham Region and City of Hamilton.

1.4 Air Quality

People experiencing homelessness are vulnerable to exposure of poor air quality. Exposure symptoms can range from milder symptoms like headaches, nose and throat irritation, to more serious symptoms like shortness of breath, wheezing, severe cough, dizziness or chest pain.

York Region Public Health monitors Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) and Air Quality Alerts from Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) and the Ontario Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks. The AQHI is a tool to help people understand how air quality can affect health. The AQHI provides real-time measurement of air pollution levels and recommendations on how people can limit their exposure and adjust their activity level during times of high air pollution.

During wildfire smoke events, York Region Public Health may issue notifications to the public and partners. In an effort to reduce exposure to wildfire smoke, York Region Homelessness Community Programs will work with emergency housing service providers to open overflow beds, when possible, if an Air Quality Advisory of 10 or higher is issued by the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. York Region Outreach Services will distribute masks to people living unsheltered to help protect them against the harmful effects of wildfire smoke. For more information, visit the [Outdoor Air Quality](#) web page on york.ca

2.0 Heat Relief Strategy for People Experiencing Homelessness

2.1 Issuing Heat Warnings and Extended Heat Warnings

The following steps are taken when Heat Warnings and Extended Heat Warnings are issued for York Region:

1. Notifications are sent to York Region Public Health when a Heat Warning is issued by Environment and Climate Change Canada
2. York Region Public Health notifies partners by sending an email to their distribution list
 - Internal partners receiving notifications include:
 - Access York
 - Community Paramedicine
 - Social Services
 - Strategic Department Communications and Engagement
 - Transit Enforcement
 - External partners receiving notifications include:
 - Food security programs
 - Local municipalities
 - Organizations providing mental health and addiction services
 - Other organizations providing services to people at risk of or experiencing homelessness
 - York Region Emergency Housing Central Intake Line
 - York Region emergency and transitional housing service providers
 - York Region funded drop-in programs
 - York Regional Police
3. The email notification advises that the **Heat Warning** will be in place for two days. The email also indicates that if extreme heat persists, an Extended Heat Warning may be issued by York Region Public Health
4. Through Strategic Department Communications and Engagement, York Region Public Health issues social media posts and news stories to advise the public of the extreme heat conditions
5. Information on how to keep safe during extreme heat can be found on york.ca/ExtremeHeat
6. York Region Public Health may issue an **Extended Heat Warning** notification when a Heat Warning extends beyond two days
7. York Region Public Health notifies their distribution list once Extended Heat Warnings have ended

To be added to the distribution list to receive Heat Warnings and Extended Heat Warnings, send an email to: Erin.Kelly@york.ca

2.2 Distribution of Cooling Supplies

York Region Homelessness Community Programs works collaboratively with emergency housing providers, drop-in programs, York Region Outreach Services, Community Paramedicine and Outreach Response Team (CPORT) and Transit Enforcement to distribute cooling supplies to people experiencing homelessness who are living unsheltered. Cooling supplies including water, sunscreen, instant ice packs, insect repellent, sun hats and sunglasses to help mitigate the effects of extreme heat on people experiencing homelessness who are living unsheltered.

2.2 Emergency Housing Central Intake Line

Anyone at risk of or experiencing homelessness in York Region who is seeking shelter can contact the Emergency Housing Central Intake Line (EHCIL) 24 hours a day, seven days a week by calling **1-877-464-9675 ext. 76140**. The EHCIL refers people experiencing homelessness to available emergency housing spaces and provides referrals to other resources as appropriate.

The EHCIL will provide people experiencing homelessness with additional supports during Heat Warnings and Extended Heat Warnings, as appropriate, which may include transportation and gift cards to accessible air-conditioned locations to purchase food and cold beverages.

2.3 Emergency Housing

Emergency and transitional housing, violence against women shelters and drop-in programs provide a range of services to help people experiencing homelessness strengthen life stability and find housing.

During the hot weather season, the risks related to extreme heat are greatest during daytime hours. During daytime hours, air-conditioned facilities are open to the public and drop-in programs are available for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

2.4 Drop-In Programs

Drop-in programs for people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness are operated by service providers throughout York Region. Programs offer food and beverages, personal care services including washrooms with showers, access to technology and Wi-Fi, case management and peer support.

Drop-in Programs				
Service Provider and Program	Location	Eligibility	Hours	Contact
360°kids – Home Base	10415 Yonge Street, Suite D, Richmond Hill	Youth (Ages 26 and under)	Monday to Friday: 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. Saturday and Sunday: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.	416-948-2186

<u>360°kids – Pop-Up</u>	Mobile outreach in Aurora, Georgina, Markham, Newmarket, Richmond Hill and Vaughan	Youth (Ages 13 to 29)	Monday to Friday: 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Call for locations	416-873-8004
<u>Canadian Mental Health Association – Community Connections</u>	15150 Yonge Street, Aurora and 710-3601 Highway 7 East, Markham	Adults	Call for hours	1-866-345-0183 ext. 3321
<u>Cornerstone to Recovery – Connections</u>	570 Steven Court, Unit B, Newmarket	Adults	Monday to Friday: 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.	905-762-1551
Salvation Army – Belinda’s Place	16580 Yonge Street, Newmarket	Adult women	Daily: 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.	289-366-4673
Salvation Army – Sutton Youth Services	20898 Dalton Road, Georgina	Youth (Ages 16 to 26)	Daily: 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.	905-722-9076
<u>Inn from the Cold</u>	623 Timothy Street, Newmarket	Adults	Daily: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., excluding holidays	647-512-8754
<u>Krasman Centre</u>	10121 Yonge Street, Richmond Hill	Adults	Monday, Thursday, Friday: 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday, Tuesday and Saturday: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday: 12:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. Open on all holidays	416-509-9681

2.5 Municipal Locations Open to the Public

Municipal facilities are open for all York Region residents to access air-conditioned spaces during operating hours. Depending on the facility, access to water fountains, washrooms, computers, telephones and Wi-Fi may be offered. Visit your [local municipality’s website](#) for more information about municipal facilities open to the public.

2.6 Community Meal Programs

People at risk of or experiencing homelessness can access community meal programs and prepared meals at no cost, which are offered daily at various locations throughout York Region.

Day	Location
Mondays: 4 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.	St. John Chrysostom Church 432 Ontario Street, Newmarket
Tuesdays: 9 a.m. to 10 a.m.	York Region Food Network 350 Industrial Parkway South, Aurora
Tuesdays: 4 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.	Trinity United Church 461 Park Avenue, Newmarket
Wednesdays: 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.	Christian Baptist Church 127 Main Street, Newmarket
Wednesdays: 5 p.m. to 6 p.m.	Trinity Anglican Church 79 Victoria Street, Aurora
Thursday*: 11:45 a.m. to 1 p.m. <i>*Second and fourth Thursday of each month only</i>	St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church 484 Water Street, Newmarket
Thursdays: 4:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.	Cedarview Church 1000 Gorham Road, Newmarket
Thursday: 5 p.m.	Keswick Presbyterian Church 23449 Woodbine Avenue, Georgina
Friday: 4:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.	Inn from the Cold 510 Penrose Street, Newmarket
Saturday: 9:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.	Trinity Anglican Church 79 Victoria Street, Aurora
Saturday: 4:30 p.m.	Crosslands Church 47 Millard Street West, Newmarket
Sunday: 4 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.	Valley View Alliance Church 800 Davis Drive, Newmarket

2.7 Indoor Temperatures

York Region Homelessness Community Programs works with Housing York Inc., emergency housing service providers and Housing with Supports operators to ensure clients have access to air conditioning in all York Region funded congregate living facilities.

2.8 Outreach and Encampments

York Region Outreach Services staff provide wraparound services and supports to people living unsheltered, including in encampments, year-round. This includes referrals to programs that offer rapid rehousing, income support, employment services, mental health and addiction programs, medical care and other individualized support as needed. Outreach Services staff are provided with resources to help them identify the signs and symptoms of heat stroke and heat exhaustion to better support people living unsheltered during Heat Warnings and Extended Heat Warnings.

During Heat Warnings, Extended Heat Warnings, and wildfire smoke events where an Air Quality Advisory is issued, Outreach Services will focus their efforts on the health and safety of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

The LOFT Crosslinks Outreach Van is a mobile service that provides food, clothing, harm reduction supplies and cooling supplies to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness in York Region. The Outreach Van operates seven days per week from 2 p.m. to 9 p.m. and can be contacted by calling or texting **1-866-553-4053**.

2.9 Transportation

York Region Homelessness Community Programs works with service providers and York Region Transit (YRT) to help people experiencing homelessness access public transportation. Service providers supply clients with public transportation fares and offer supplementary transportation support, including taxi fares and rides through program vehicles. YRT's [Mobility On-Request](#) transit service – a ride-sharing service that allows people to request transit when and where they need it – is available to seniors within select service areas throughout York Region.

YRT Enforcement staff will receive Heat Warning and Extended Heat Warning notifications from York Region Public Health and support people experiencing homelessness using the transit system and facilities at bus terminals. YRT Enforcement staff are provided with cooling supplies, bus transfer tickets and other resources to distribute to support people experiencing homelessness.

3.0 Roles and Responsibilities

Implementation of the Heat Relief Strategy involves York Region staff, local municipalities, and community partners. The following section outlines the roles and responsibilities of each:

York Region Homelessness Community Programs, Social Services Branch:

As Service Manager, York Region Homelessness Community Programs provides supports and services to people at risk of or experiencing homelessness and coordinates the following elements of the Heat Relief Strategy:

- Provides funding to service providers, community partners and partnering municipal facilities to help keep people experiencing homelessness safe during the hot weather season
- Monitors Environment and Climate Change Canada weather forecast to coordinate with emergency housing facilities to open overflow beds during extreme weather events
- Provides updated contacts for Public Health's email distribution list to include internal and external partners who provide services to people experiencing homelessness
- Provides supports to people living in outdoor spaces through dedicated Outreach Services staff
- Provides training to staff in local municipalities, including fire departments, community centres, libraries, and bylaw enforcement to deepen understanding on how best to support people experiencing homelessness

York Region Public Health:

- Monitors Environment and Climate Change Canada weather forecast and early notifications
- Provides communications to partners through an email distribution list when Environment and Climate Change Canada issues a Heat Warning
- Issues Extended Heat Warnings when Heat Warnings continue into day three

- Shares information and tips with the public about how to keep safe during hot weather through social media, news stories, and by maintaining content on york.ca/ExtremeHeat
- Maintains an up-to-date email distribution list for Heat Warnings and Extended Heat Warnings
- Notifies partners and the public when an Extended Heat Warning has ended
- Monitors wildfire smoke conditions, the AQHI and Air Quality Alert notifications (e.g., Special Air Quality Statements, Air Quality Advisory) from Environment and Climate Change Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks during wildfire smoke events
- Provides communications to partners and the public as appropriate

York Region Transit:

- Monitors transit riders, stops and terminals for individuals who may need support
- Offers complimentary transport or bus fare for individuals who need to get to emergency housing or other forms of shelter and/or cooling spaces
- Connects individuals to the Emergency Housing Central Intake Line, Access York or Homelessness Community Programs staff for assistance
- Offers supplies to individuals in need of protective or safety measures including the distribution of cooling supplies

York Regional Police:

The York Regional Police work with residents, local businesses and community organizations to promote strong, safe and healthy communities. This includes connecting residents with services and assisting individuals to find emergency housing or other forms of shelter, as appropriate, including throughout the hot weather season.

York Region Paramedic Services:

In addition to providing emergency medical response to York Region residents, during the hot weather season, Paramedic Services:

- Notifies other first responders of Heat Warnings and Extended Heat Warnings
- Informs people experiencing homelessness when hot weather conditions are expected or currently exist
- Supports residents to find emergency housing or access to services, as appropriate

Emergency Housing Providers:

Throughout the year, emergency housing locations offer temporary shelter and provide a range of services and supports for people who are experiencing homelessness and have no safe, alternative housing option. People seeking shelter contact the Emergency Housing Central Intake Line to access a space in emergency housing. During the hot weather season, emergency housing providers will:

- Distribute heat protection and safety supplies such as sunscreen, hats, and water
- Open overflow beds during extreme weather events as directed by the Region

Local Municipalities:

- Direct residents to heat relief services and supports
- Respond to inquiries during heat warnings and make referrals to the Emergency Housing Central Intake Line for emergency housing services, as appropriate

Other Community Agencies:

Community agencies throughout York Region provide daily services and supports to individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Agencies are encouraged to share Heat Warnings and Extended Heat Warnings over social media and refer residents seeking shelter or supports during extreme heat to the Emergency Housing Central Intake Line or York Region Outreach Services.

Additional Resources

1. [Heat Illness Requiring Emergency Care for People Experiencing Homelessness: A Case Study Series](#)
2. [World Health Organization. Heat and health](#)
3. [Extreme Heat and People Experiencing Homelessness](#)
4. [Current Evidence on the Effectiveness of Interventions During Heat Episodes](#)
5. [A Harmonized Heat Warning and Information System for Ontario \(HWIS\)](#)
6. [Developing a Harmonized Heat Warning and Information System for Ontario: A Case Study in Collaboration](#)

For more information about York Region's Heat Relief Strategy for People Experiencing Homelessness contact Erin Kelly, Program Manager, Housing Stability and Homelessness at Erin.Kelly@york.ca