

**Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH)  
Bureau of Climate and Environmental Health (BCEH)**

The following resource provides recommendations for municipalities in their operation of cooling centers and outlines actions municipalities may take to help prevent health impacts caused by hot weather.

**Extreme Heat**

The Bureau of Climate and Environmental Health (BCEH) protects the public from environmental exposures that cause illness and disease by identifying and evaluating hazards in the natural and built environment, including extreme heat. Extreme heat is a prolonged period of very hot weather, which may include high humidity. Extreme heat can be dangerous and even life-threatening if proper precautions are not taken. Check out the BCEH Environmental Public Health Tracking website to learn about community-specific climate data: <https://matracking.ehs.state.ma.us/Climate-Change/index.html> and the CDC’s [heat tracker](#).

**Community Cooling Centers**

In Massachusetts, heat-related illnesses occur more frequently when temperatures are greater than 90 degrees. Community cooling centers can provide temporary relief from extreme heat. Cooling centers should be located in air-conditioned buildings that are open to the public—this includes libraries, town halls, and senior centers. If you plan to open a cooling center in your community, please ensure that the Emergency Management Director (or designee) for that community updates the shelter status in [Web-EOC \(WebEOC 9.15 Login \(webeocasp.com\)\)](#)

**Recommendations on Setting up Cooling Centers**

Please refer to the checklist below for recommendations on implementing a cooling center in your community:

- ✓ Coordinate with local board of health in implementation plans
  - What is the available budget and staff?
  - Are there volunteer organizations, such as medical reserve corps, that are already included in planning efforts or that could assist?
- ✓ Identify other government agencies, non-profit partners, and other key stakeholders that should be involved such as senior community centers, libraries, and city/town halls
  - Check agency policies, local laws, and ordinances
  - Coordinate [transportation](#) for those who need it
- ✓ Consider basic supplies to help meet the needs of guests, including, but not limited to, access to medical supplies, clean, chilled drinking water, snacks, and activities/entertainment
- ✓ Identify vulnerable neighborhoods and populations in need, including how to reach them to provide cooling center information. Consider using DPH’s [Climate Change Vulnerability Mapping Tool](#) to identify these locations.
- ✓ Identify relevant materials and utilize [existing](#) guidance
- ✓ Widely advertise the cooling center throughout the community in multiple languages via flyers, web postings, reverse 911 calls, social media, etc.

Municipalities should assess the need for providing the following resources at cooling centers:

Best Practice	Recommended
Air-conditioned; fans	Back-up generator available
Accessible to the public; signs displaying operating hours, rules, and on-site assistance	Activities available for guests

American Disabilities Act (ADA) compliant	Separate room for families, children, and nursing mothers
Access to clean, chilled water	Access to snacks; Provisions for pets
Seating available for all guests	Access to power station so visitors can charge phones or electronic devices
Advertised throughout community in multiple languages	On-site health and social services, including proper respiratory illness precautions

### Preventing Heat Illnesses—Additional Resources

Check the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency’s (MEMA) [extreme heat safety tips](#) for more information on preventing heat illnesses. Communities can take additional steps, including:

- ✓ Communicate heat safety tips to the community in multiple languages, including recommendations for staying safe in homes without air conditioning and heat safety information for [outdoor workers](#)
- ✓ Partner with community health centers to perform wellness checks on high-risk populations
- ✓ Promote use of public parks, pools, water bodies, or other outdoor means of cooling off during extreme heat

Check out the MDPH/BCEH [Climate Hazard Adaptation Profile \(CHAP\)](#) for [Extreme Heat and Poor Air Quality](#) to learn more, including the following:

- ✓ Health effects of extreme heat and poor air quality
- ✓ People who are the most vulnerable to extreme heat events and heat-related air quality hazards
- ✓ Intervention strategies for reducing health impacts

In the long term, communities can adopt the following strategies:

- ✓ Adopt hot weather emergency preparedness and response plans
- ✓ Plant additional trees, shrubs, and other forms of cover
- ✓ Promote energy-efficient building retrofits and design

Visit the DPH/BCEH [Climate and Health Website](#) for more information, including:

- ✓ How climate change harms health
- ✓ Climate change and health equity
- ✓ Climate profiles for all 351 cities and towns in MA

**Questions?** Specialists at the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Bureau of Climate and Environmental Health, are available to answer your questions. Contact us at (617) 624-5757 (TTY: (617) 624-5286) or visit our website.

**Learn more:** [mass.gov/bceh](https://mass.gov/bceh)

References:

<https://www.cdc.gov/climateandhealth/docs/UseOfCoolingCenters.pdf>