

Heat Relief Services Update Report

Date: February 12, 2019

To: Board of Health

From: Medical Officer of Health

Wards: All

SUMMARY

In January 2019, City Council adopted a report from the Medical Officer of Health that proposed a strategy for heat relief services in order to put the City in a stronger position to protect residents from extreme heat. At this meeting, additional motions were adopted that aim to strengthen the hot weather response through enhanced signage of cool spaces, and consideration for creating shade structures, cool rooms in apartment buildings, and voluntary contact lists of vulnerable tenants in apartments.

This report provides an update on the work accomplished to implement heat relief strategies for summer 2019 and how additional strategies will be incorporated into the work plan.

To coordinate the implementation of heat relief strategies, City Council requested the Deputy City Manager, Corporate Services to develop a Heat Relief Work Group with representation from nine City Divisions to more effectively coordinate initiatives which have been shown to be successful for addressing extreme heat. These initiatives include the development of a strategic communications plan, enhancements to web-based information, expansion of the Heat Relief Network, introduction of shade structures, and piloting a neighbour-checking program.

As weather patterns continue to change and periods of hot weather increase in both duration and intensity, the City's response to hot weather must also evolve. Given that Toronto can expect to experience more days of extreme heat, the Heat Relief Work Group has determined that for the long-term, vulnerable populations will be best protected through a seasonal response to hot weather where support is provided through pre-existing services that they already access.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. City Council request the Executive Director, Municipal Licensing & Standards, in collaboration with the Medical Officer of Health, as part of their heat in apartments working group to identify strategies to address indoor temperatures in apartment buildings, to explore the feasibility of the following:

a. Options for window protection in apartment buildings that balance child safety with the ability to permit air circulation for heat relief, and consider potential modifications to Municipal Code Chapter 629, Property Standards;

b. Strategies to continue to increase communication to landlords to provide clarity that landlords do not need to turn the heat on between September 15 and June 1 where the unit is a minimum of 21 degrees Celsius without heating.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial impacts arising from this report beyond what has already been approved.

DECISION HISTORY

In January 2019, City Council approved the development of a work group to coordinate the implementation of heat relief strategies for summer 2019, and to consider specific initiatives including neighbour checking, signage, shade structures, and cool rooms. <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.OM2.1>

In March 2018, the Board of Health requested the Medical Officer of Health report back on the Heat Relief Network, including the review of the Cooling Centres and assess how best people who are experiencing homelessness or are under-housed can access cool space. <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2018.HL25.3>

In May 2017, the Board of Health adopted a report that considered options to reduce vulnerability to extreme heat, including a vulnerable persons list. <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2017.HL19.5>

COMMENTS

Hot weather has been associated with a number of health impacts ranging from heat stroke to more serious effects, such as cardiovascular-related morbidity and mortality. It is projected that by 2040-2050, the City can expect to experience approximately 66 days with maximum temperatures above 30°C as compared with 18 such days in the summer of 2018¹. In response, it is important for the City to continue to evolve its approach to hot weather in order to strengthen protection for residents, especially vulnerable groups.

This report has been prepared in consultation with the Heat Relief Work Group that includes Shelter, Support & Housing Administration, Social Development, Finance & Administration, Parks, Forestry & Recreation, Environment & Energy Division, Facilities Management, Municipal Licensing & Standards, City Planning, Information & Technology, Strategic Communications, and the Chief Resilience Officer. The Heat Relief Work Group, as directed by City Council, is coordinating heat relief strategies for the city to be implemented in summer 2019.

Heat Relief Strategies – Summer 2019

The mandate of the Heat Relief Work Group is to develop a City-wide Heat Relief Strategy to be implemented in May 2019 that improves resilience to extreme heat across the City and identifies long-term strategies to the City's heat response. The strategy will involve adapting the heat relief response to the changing weather patterns (i.e., climate change) and increasing support through existing services.

To date, the work group has developed the following strategies for the summer of 2019:

- Expansion of the Heat Relief Network, that maximizes the number of cool spaces available such as libraries and community centres, to include new organizations;
- Development of a new searchable heat/health website that highlights locations of the Heat Relief Network cool spaces;
- Introduction of a strategic communications campaign;
- Exploration of a voluntary tenants contact list;
- Implementation of a neighbour checking pilot program;
- Introduction of shade structures at older apartment tower sites;
- Assessment of the feasibility of creating cool rooms in apartment buildings; and,
- Enhanced signage of cool spaces.

Additional details of the strategies planned for this summer were outlined in the November 2018 Board of Health report that was also considered at the January 30, 2019 City Council meeting and can be found here:

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.OM2.1>

The Heat Relief Work Group has determined that the most effective approach to mitigate impacts of heat are to continue to increase community access to cooling based on pre-existing services that are already used by the public. As a result, starting this summer, rather than providing a separate service of seven Cooling Centres the public will be able to access cool spaces available throughout the summer season at approximately 180 locations that are currently part of the Heat Relief Network, as well as other organizations as the network expands. In addition, access to cooling for people who are experiencing homelessness will be integrated into pre-existing services that already serve vulnerable populations such as shelters, drop-ins, and respite centres. Toronto Public Health, with the Heat Relief Work Group, will continue to work with Shelter, Support & Housing Administration to confirm options for ensuring appropriate shelter and/or respite supports for individuals who are homeless and/or under-housed and may be experiencing heat-related illness.

To avoid duplication with the Heat Warnings/Extended Heat Warnings that are issued by Environment and Climate Change Canada, the Medical Officer of Health will not

issue Heat Warnings/Extended Heat Warnings given they are communicated broadly through Environment and Climate Change Canada. However, TPH will continue to issue internal warnings to other Divisions and community partners to provide information in support of their programs and response activities (e.g., extending pool hours).

The Heat Relief Work Group intends to work with Parks, Forestry & Recreation (PFR) to identify opportunities to increase access to drinking water for hydration during hot weather. This would include supporting PFR's long-term strategy to improve access to drinking water in parks by replacing or installing new drinking water stations, including water bottle refill stations. Access to drinking water has been shown to be an important measure for mitigating health impacts of extreme heat, particularly for children and vulnerable groups. As a part of the new searchable heat/health website, TPH, in collaboration with Information & Technology and Parks, Forestry, & Recreation, is also exploring opportunities to include City-operated water station locations on the interactive map found at the heat /health website with Heat Relief Network locations.

In addition, at the January 2019 meeting, City Council requested the Heat Relief Work Group to explore the feasibility of cool rooms and maintaining a voluntary contact list for vulnerable tenants. In May 2017, TPH reported to the Board of Health on the feasibility of requiring building owners and/or property managers to maintain a list of vulnerable residents who may require assistance getting to a cool space, based on consultations with landlord and tenant advocate groups. At the time, it was recommended for TPH to leverage systems already in place, such as the Fire Safety Plan and existing networks in buildings and neighbourhoods to provide support to vulnerable individuals. This was due to concerns about potential confidentiality issues for tenants disclosing their health status in a list provided to landlords. In response to the motion, TPH will leverage the Heat Relief Work Group to identify additional strategies.

Heat in Apartments

There are many older apartment buildings in Toronto, including approximately 3,400 that do not have air conditioning. Strategies to increase access to a cool space for these residents include several of the initiatives that are being implemented this summer, such as:

- A neighbour-checking program;
- A pilot of shade structures at apartment sites; and,
- Exploration of a voluntary contact list and cool rooms.

Another proposed strategy is to explore options for window protection that eliminate the use of measures that restrict outside air circulating into apartments. Municipal Code Chapter 629, Property Standards, requires landlords to install and maintain window safety devices on all apartment unit windows, which restricts the opening to no more than 10 cm. It is intended to ensure child safety; however, concerns have been raised that the By-law restricts outside air circulating into the apartment, making it a challenge to manage temperature during hot weather.

In 2011, MLS reported to the Licensing and Standards Committee on whether exemptions should be made to the Property Standards By-law requirements for window safety. The report did not support exemptions at that time, and emphasized other

opportunities for tenants to gain relief from the heat. Toronto Public Health will work with MLS to explore potential strategies specific to window safety devices that could be implemented that balance the need for child safety with the ability to enable air circulation for heat relief.

Toronto Public Health will also work with MLS to increase communication to landlords to provide clarity that landlords do not need to turn the heat on between September 15 and June 1 when the unit is a minimum of 21°C without heating. For example, if it is unusually warm weather outside resulting in an indoor temperature in apartment units at a temperature of 21° C, then landlords can turn off the heat. Toronto Public Health will work with MLS to provide increased messaging to clarify interpretation of the By-law during the shoulder season (i.e., during the fall and spring when the weather shifts) that will include:

- Letters and emails to landlords;
- Media communication;
- Direct communication with stakeholder organizations; and,
- Site visits as needed.

Communication to landlords related to interpretation of Municipal Code Chapter 497, Heating, as well as consideration of options for window protection will be reviewed as part of the MLS working group who are identifying strategies to address indoor temperatures in apartment buildings.

Hot Weather Response and Long-Term Strategies

In addition to the strategies that will be implemented this summer, the following initiatives are also being explored as part of a longer-term response to heat:

- Signage and branding for the Heat Relief Network through looking at practices in other jurisdictions and City Divisions;
- Shade provision in city planning processes; and,
- Providing input on the long-term City's broader response to climate change and resilience, based on the City's 2019 hot weather response.

The 2019 Heat Relief Strategy will enable the City to coordinate a City-wide approach, which would eventually be incorporated into the City's broader response to climate change and building the City's resilience. The Chief Resilience Officer is currently developing the City's first Resilience Strategy, and is actively participating in the Heat Relief Work Group.

The Heat Relief Strategy will be launched on May 15, at the beginning of the heat season. Toronto Public Health plans to report to the Board of Health in fall 2019, in collaboration with Corporate Services and other City Divisions on the outcomes of the summer 2019 heat relief initiatives. This report will include any budget implications for 2020, based on the new initiatives that are implemented this summer.

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SIGNATURE

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REFERENCES

1. Toronto Environment Office. 2012. Toronto's Future Weather and Climate Driver Study: Outcomes Report. Summary of the SENES Consultants Ltd. Study. Available at: <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/982c-Torontos-Future-Weather-and-Climate-Drivers-Study-2012.pdf>