

Community-run Cooling Rooms: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Purpose: The goal of this document is to provide information to organizations across Toronto choosing to supplement the City's program of Emergency Cooling Centres by running their own Cooling Rooms in a way that best suits the needs of their community.

Background

This year's heat season (May 15 to September 30) is more challenging due to the COVID-19 pandemic and related State of Emergency declarations by the Province of Ontario and Toronto Mayor John Tory. Many locations that would normally provide a cool space to people in Toronto during the heat season are closed or operating at reduced capacity.

For this reason, the main focus of the City of Toronto 2020 Heat Relief Strategy, as recommended by Toronto Public Health, is to provide targeted relief for the most vulnerable populations, including individuals experiencing homelessness, residents in apartment towers without access to cooling, and those who have the highest risk of negative health outcomes during Heat Warnings. Health evidence demonstrates that individuals without access to cooling, particularly vulnerable populations, are at risk of heat-related illness.

More information about the City's Heat Relief Strategy for 2020 can be found at <https://www.toronto.ca/keepcool>

What is a Heat Warning?

Environment and Climate Change Canada issues a Heat Warning for southern Ontario (including Toronto) when there is a forecast of:

- two or more consecutive days with daytime maximum temperatures of 31°C or warmer, together with nighttime minimum temperatures of 20°C or warmer, or
- two or more consecutive days with humidex values expected to reach 40 or higher.

You can download the (free) WeatherCAN Mobile App to receive notifications about Heat Warnings, or check Environment and Climate Change Canada's website https://weather.gc.ca/warnings/index_e.html.

City's Emergency Cooling Centre Program

To help individuals keep cool this season, the City is running an Emergency Cooling Centre (ECC) program at a select number of locations across the city. The ECCs are open from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. (with the exception of Metro Hall, which is open 24 hours) during Heat Warnings issued by Environment and Climate Change Canada. The ECCs offer a publicly accessible, air-conditioned place for residents and their pets to rest indoors and receive bottled water. Staff who are trained to assist residents affected by the extreme heat are on hand. Strict infection prevention and control measures are in place to help prevent the spread of COVID-19. Locations of the ECCs, as well as other cool spaces (i.e. swimming pools) are available at <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/health-wellness-care/health-programs-advice/hot-weather/cool-spaces-near-you/#location=&lat=&lng=>

What are Cooling Rooms?

Cooling Rooms are designated air-conditioned locations available to the public (and their pets) who don't have access to cooling to escape the heat, rest and hydrate.

Why Offer Community-run Cooling Rooms?

The City supports organizations opening Community-run Cooling Rooms, to expand the options for cool spaces across Toronto. Community-run Cooling Rooms would enhance the network of available cool spaces available in the city and would allow more communities to benefit from a more localized heat relief option.

How will the City support Community-run Cooling Rooms?

To support Community-run Cooling Rooms, the City:

- Has prepared guidelines to ensure public health measures are in place at all Community-run Cooling Rooms <https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/community-settings-workplaces/?accordion=cooling-rooms>
- Has prepared signage to promote physical distancing and other infection prevention and control measures <https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-how-you-can-help/covid-19-spread-the-word/>
- Will post the location and hours of operation of Community-run Cooling Rooms on the "Cool Spaces Near You" web page of the [City's website](#), if requested.

The City does not provide funding or resources to organizations looking to operate a Community-run Cooling Room, nor can the City provide advice on whether your organization will be in compliance with Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act (EMCPA) emergency orders if you operate a Cooling Room.

What should Community-run Cooling Rooms provide?

A Community-run Cooling Room should have a designated cool, air-conditioned space, tables and chairs for resting, and water for people who would like some. Water for pets and information on tips to beat the heat can also be considered to offer.

Who can use Community-run Cooling Rooms?

Ideally, a Cooling Room should be accessible to anyone who does not have access to personal cooling spaces and/or feels the effects of the heat.

When should Community-run Cooling Rooms open?

Ideally, Cooling Rooms should aim to provide a space for the public to keep cool during the hottest times during the summer. This is typically during the day, on days when Environment and Climate Change Canada has issued a Heat Warning.

What do Community-run Cooling Room staff need to do?

It is up to each organization to determine how/whether their Cooling Room should be staffed and what training is required. The Cooling Room Guidelines provide recommendations for how staff should be trained and for how a Cooling Room should be set up.

City of Toronto materials for your information

- Tips to Beat the Heat are available at <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/health-wellness-care/health-programs-advice/hot-weather/beat-the-heat/>
- Beat the Heat resources are available under “Health-Related Educational Resources” at: <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/health-wellness-care/health-programs-advice/hot-weather/additional-resources/>
- Toronto Public Health Guidelines & this FAQ material: <https://www.toronto.ca/home/covid-19/covid-19-protect-yourself-others/community-settings-workplaces/?accordion=cooling-rooms>