

# THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF YORK

## 2026 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 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 2026 Heat Relief Strategy is in effect from June 1 to September 30, 2026, 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 heat safety and cooling 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 during extreme weather events, where possible

### 1.2 Extreme Heat and Homelessness

People experiencing homelessness are disproportionately vulnerable to negative health impacts from 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 heat safety and cooling 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 heat-related illness increases with each successive day without cooling. Warm overnight temperatures may also worsen health effects due to limited recovery time from daytime heat.

While the impact of extreme heat can be serious, there are protective measures which can prevent or reduce the negative health effects from extreme heat, such as warning the public of extreme heat events, distributing educational materials, distributing heat safety and cooling supplies (such as water, hats and sunscreen), and providing access to cool, indoor spaces.

For more information on extreme heat, including symptoms and treatment for heat-related illnesses, a link to the York Region Cool Spaces map and practical tips to deal with extreme heat, visit [york.ca/ExtremeHeat](http://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.

#### Public Health Notification Thresholds

As part of their Extreme Heat Program, York Region Public Health notifies the public and its partners of hot and humid weather that can negatively affect health. These notifications provide consistent, evidence-based information about extreme heat. The thresholds 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, Extreme Heat Warnings and Special Weather Statements are issued in York Region based on the criteria below.

Level	Criteria	Duration
<b>Special Weather Statement</b>	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
<b>Heat Warning</b>	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
<b>Extended Heat Warning</b>	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 and social media.

#### Homelessness Community Programs Notification Thresholds

In addition to the notifications outlined above, York Region Homelessness Community Programs may issue a Special Weather Alert when additional weather factors increase the risk for people experiencing homelessness.

Level	Criteria	Duration
<b>Special Weather Alert</b>	Discretionary alert issued by York Region Homelessness Community Programs when extreme weather events have the potential to put people experiencing homelessness at greater risk. Examples include but are not limited to drought, wildfires, thunderstorms, earthquakes, flooding, and other conditions.	No defined duration

## 1.4 Air Quality

People experiencing homelessness are vulnerable to increased exposure to poor outdoor 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 the Air Quality Health Index (AQHI) and Air Quality Warnings issued by Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) and the Ontario Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP). The AQHI is a tool to help people understand how air quality can negatively 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.

York Region Public Health may notify the public and partners of poor air quality events through social media and email. York Region Outreach Services may also distribute masks to people living unsheltered to help protect them against poor air quality, such as the harmful effects of wildfire smoke. For more information on outdoor air pollution, visit [york.ca/OutdoorAir](http://york.ca/OutdoorAir).

## 2.0 Heat Relief Strategy for People Experiencing Homelessness

### 2.1 Issuing Heat Warnings and Extended Heat Warnings

York Region Public Health monitors Environment and Climate Change Canada’s notifications seven days a week and notifies the public and partners when hot weather could negatively affect health. If ECCC issues a heat warning, York Region Public Health will:

1. Notify partners by sending an email to their distribution list
  - Internal partners receiving notifications include, but are not limited to:
    - Community Paramedicine
    - Social Services
    - Strategic Department Communications and Engagement
    - Transit Enforcement
  - External partners receiving notifications include, but are not limited to:
    - Food security programs
    - Local municipalities
    - Organizations providing mental health and addiction services

- Other organizations providing services to people experiencing homelessness
- York Region Emergency Housing Central Intake Line
- York Region emergency and transitional housing service providers
- York Region funded drop-in programs
- 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. 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: [HCPWeatherAlerts@york.ca](mailto:HCPWeatherAlerts@york.ca)

2. Notify the public, through social media posts and/or news stories.

## 2.2 Distribution of Heat Safety and Cooling Supplies

York Region Outreach Services distributes heat safety and cooling supplies to people experiencing homelessness who are living unsheltered in collaboration with Community Paramedicine and Transit Enforcement. Heat safety and cooling supplies including water, sunscreen, instant ice packs, insect repellent, sun hats and sunglasses help to mitigate the effects of extreme heat on people experiencing homelessness who are living unsheltered.

## 2.3 Emergency Housing Central Intake Line

Anyone experiencing or at risk of 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.

## 2.4 Emergency Housing and Seasonal Shelters

Emergency housing and family and gender-based violence shelters provide a range of services to help people experiencing homelessness to find housing and access supports.

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 experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Information about emergency housing and seasonal shelters in York Region can be found at [york.ca/EmergencyHousing](http://york.ca/EmergencyHousing).

## 2.5 Drop-In Programs

Drop-in programs provide a cool space, food and beverages, access to personal care services including washrooms with showers, access to technology and Wi-Fi, and case management support to find housing, peer support and opportunities for social connection. Detailed information about drop-in program locations and hours can be found at [york.ca/EmergencyHousing](http://york.ca/EmergencyHousing).

## 2.6 Municipal Locations Open to the Public

Municipal facilities are open for all York Region residents to access [cool 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.

## 2.7 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. Information about community meal programs can be found at [york.ca/EmergencyHousing](http://york.ca/EmergencyHousing). Information about food banks is available at [fbyr.ca/find-food](http://fbyr.ca/find-food).

## 2.8 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.

## 2.9 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 Warning 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 heat safety 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**.

## 2.10 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.

When YRT Enforcement staff receive Heat Warning and Extended Heat Warning notifications from York Region Public Health, they provide additional support for people experiencing homelessness using the transit system and facilities at bus terminals. This includes distribution of heat safety and cooling supplies, bus transfer tickets and other resources.

## 3.0 Acknowledgements

York Region would like to acknowledge the efforts of local municipalities and community partners to develop and implement the Heat Relief Strategy for People Experiencing Homelessness. This work involves coordination with the Region's Homelessness Community Programs, Public Health, Transit and Paramedic Services.

York Region would also like to express its gratitude towards its partners, which include emergency housing and seasonal shelter providers, local municipalities, York Regional Police, Fire Services, United Way Greater Toronto, and other community agencies serving people experiencing homelessness throughout York Region.

## 4.0 Additional Resources

1. [Heat-Related Health Risks for People Experiencing Homelessness: A Rapid Review](#)
2. [Heat Illness Requiring Emergency Care for People Experiencing Homelessness: A Case Study Series](#)
3. [World Health Organization. Heat and health](#)
4. [Interventions to Mitigate Health Harms of Heat Events](#)
5. [Government of Canada. Colour-coded weather alerts](#)
6. [A Harmonized Heat Warning and Information System for Ontario \(HWIS\)](#)
7. [Heat alert and response systems in Canada: A check-up on preparedness](#)

For more information about York Region's Heat Relief Strategy for People Experiencing Homelessness, contact [HCPWeatherAlerts@york.ca](mailto:HCPWeatherAlerts@york.ca)