

Heat Health Alert System 2013-2014

Information and guidance

Introduction

The department's Heat Health Alert System has been developed to notify councils, departmental program areas, hospitals, and health and community service providers of forecast heatwave conditions which are likely to impact on human health.

The heat health alert is intended to notify recipients that mean temperatures are predicted to reach and exceed heat health thresholds. The alert is not intended to dictate when service providers take action; heat health alert contacts are advised to monitor local conditions and take action in accordance with their own heatwave plans, service continuity plans and occupational health and safety (OH&S) plans.

The Heat Health Alert System has been reviewed and will operate from December 2013 to the end of February 2014.

Weather forecast districts

The Heat Health Alert System will continue to operate based on the Bureau of Meteorology weather forecast districts and boundaries (Figure 1) which are also the districts used for total fire bans and fire danger ratings.

Figure 1: Weather forecast districts and corresponding heat health temperature thresholds

Image adapted from the Country Fire Authority's 'Know your total fire ban district'.

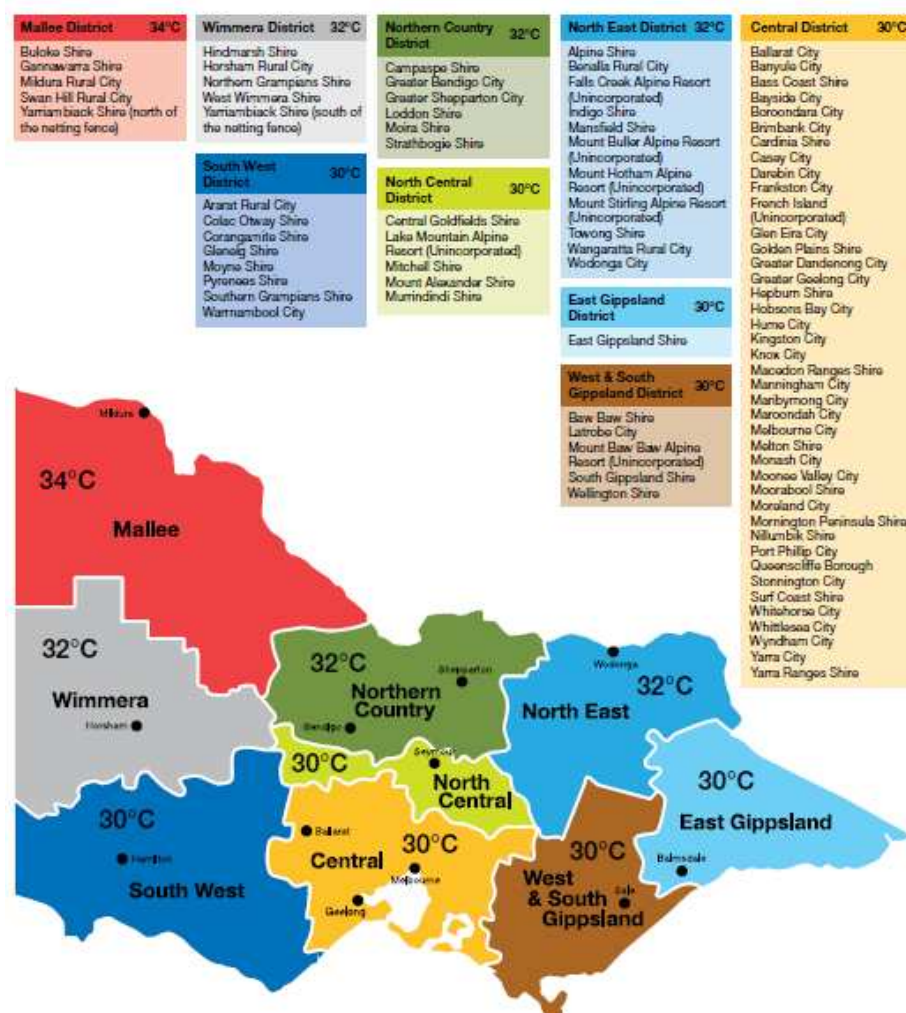


Image adapted from the Country Fire Authority's 'Know your total fire ban district'.

Heat health temperature thresholds

The Department of Health has identified heat health temperature thresholds for Victoria, above which heat-related illness and mortality increases substantially.

These thresholds are based on a range of evidence and information and differ across the state to recognise the higher temperatures experienced in northern parts of Victoria. A heat health temperature threshold has been established for each of the nine weather forecast districts as shown in Figure 1.

The department will monitor the Bureau of Meteorology forecast daily minimum and maximum temperatures and calculate the daily average temperature for each weather forecast district (Figure 2).

The average temperature for any given day is the average of the forecast daily maximum temperature and the forecast overnight temperature (which is the daily minimum for the following day).

When forecast average temperatures are predicted to reach or exceed the heat health temperature threshold for a specific weather forecast district, the department will issue a heat health alert for that district

Heat health alerts

The heat health alerts aim to notify relevant local government councils and service providers that heatwave conditions are imminent.

The department will also be considering other factors that may influence vulnerability, such as very high maximum or minimum temperatures and high temperatures over a prolonged consecutive period. High temperature alerts may be issued in these circumstances even if the average temperature threshold is not exceeded. Contacts should remember that prolonged high temperatures below threshold levels can still impact on health services.

Where possible, heat health alerts will be issued by email 3-4 days prior to forecast heatwave conditions and should provide recipients with early warning. Confirmation of the heatwave event will not be issued as heat health alerts will continue to advise recipients to monitor local conditions to determine organisational actions. The alerts will be issued for those regions predicted to reach or exceed heat health temperature thresholds.

Once a heat health alert is issued, local councils, departmental program areas and health and community service providers should respond in accordance with their heatwave plans.

Whilst the department will be monitoring forecast temperatures across the state, it is important for councils to continue to monitor local conditions. **It may be necessary for councils to activate heatwave plans in the absence of a heat health alert being issued.** Council contacts are encouraged to monitor local conditions using the Bureau of Meteorology forecasts and act accordingly.

Figure 2: Example calculation of the daily average temperature



The Department of Health will issue heat health alerts to:

- local government authorities
- emergency services
- health & aged care sector
- government departments and agencies
- departmental program areas
- statewide & major metropolitan service providers
- peak or advocacy groups.

The heat health alerts are available from the Department of Health website www.health.vic.gov.au/chiefhealthofficer/ where a Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feed is available for subscription to receive the heat health alerts directly.