

# Heat wave: Caring for babies and young children

Babies and young children (up to 4 years of age) are particularly sensitive to the effects of high temperatures and can quickly get stressed by heat. They may not always show signs or symptoms as quickly as an adult, even though they have been affected. They rely on others to control their environment and keep them from getting dehydrated or overheated and it is very important to watch them closely.

## Signs of heat stress and what to do

- Babies and young children may not show early signs and symptoms of the effects of heat. They may just look unwell or be more irritable than usual. Babies may seem floppy, have drier skin, and refuse to drink, or have fewer wet nappies than usual. The soft spot on top of a baby's head (fontanelle) may also be lower than usual.
- If you think your child is suffering the effects of heat:
  - call *healthdirect Australia* on 1800 022 222; or
  - call your GP and arrange to see them urgently; or
  - take your baby to the Emergency Department of your nearest hospital

## Feeding and drinking

- Babies are not able to tell you that they are thirsty, so it is important to make sure they are getting enough to drink.
- During hot weather, breast fed babies may need extra breast feeds. Small amounts of cool boiled water can be given between feeds, especially if the baby is having other foods.
- Bottle fed babies may need extra formula or small amounts of cool boiled water.
- Give young children regular drinks throughout the day, ideally water. Avoid giving sugary or fizzy drinks.
- A refreshing idea for children who are old enough is to freeze fruit pieces (orange quarters, watermelon) for them to suck on – but be prepared for the sticky mess!

## Keeping cool

- Dress babies and young children in light, loose clothing (singlet and nappy, loose top).
- Keep them cool. Lukewarm baths or regularly sponging with lukewarm water may help. Cool or cold water should not be used.



- Choose the coolest place in the house for babies or young children to sleep and make sure the air can circulate around the bassinette or cot (remove any liners or padding). Don't leave babies to sleep in a pram.
- If you have no fan or air-conditioner, you can cover your baby or toddler's body with cool damp cloths and place wet towels or sheets around the bassinette or cot to cool the air immediately near them. Check your baby regularly to make sure they are not getting too cold.
- If you use a fan, don't point it towards the baby but use it to keep the air circulating.
- If you have an air-conditioner, make sure the room does not get too cold (about 24 to 26 degrees Celsius is low enough).

### Going outside or travelling

- Avoid taking your baby or young child out during periods of extreme heat.
- If you have to go outside, make sure that your baby's skin is protected from the sun by keeping in the shade or by covering the skin with loose clothing and a hat. Use baby or toddler formula sunscreen on parts of the baby's skin which cannot be covered by clothing. Always check the label before applying.
- **Babies can overheat very quickly in hot weather and especially in cars.** Avoid travelling in hot weather. If you need to travel, do it early in the day.
- Even in cool temperatures, cars can heat up to dangerous temperatures very quickly. **Never leave babies, children, or animals alone in a car, even if the air-conditioning is on**, as they can still get stressed from the heat.
- Make sure a baby or child does not have the sun shining on them when they are travelling in a car, or when the car is still, as this can cause overheating. As a baby's skin is very thin, it can burn in sunlight which has passed through car windows, especially if their skin is not covered.
- Never cover a baby capsule in a car with a rug or towel to shade baby from the sun as this will restrict air moving around the baby, which will make them hotter.

For more information on how to keep healthy during extreme heat, visit our website [www.public.health.wa.gov.au](http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au)

