Heat Emergencies and You: Part 2

ASAN
AUTISTIC SELF ADVOCACY NETWORK

THE PARTNERSHIP
FOR INCLUSIVE DISASTER STRATEGIES

Language Access

- Spanish interpretation
- American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation
- CART captioning in English and Spanish

Language Access

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Language Access

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Language Access

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Language Access

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Welcoming Remarks

Agenda:

- Introduction: Why heat and disability ?
- Safety toolkit
- Policy Guide
- Paper on autism and climate change
- Q&A

Introduction to Project

Cooling the Crisis Resources

Policy Briefs and Fact Sheets in:

- Formal language
- Plain language
- Easy Read

Find them here: https://disasterstrategies.org/2026-cooling-the-crisis/

What are Heat Emergencies?

- **Heat emergencies** are situations where extreme heat and humidity create a risk to people's health.
- Heat.gov says "**extreme heat**" is 2 days or more of temperatures above 90°F (32°C).

Why is Extreme Heat Dangerous?

- Heat makes it hard for people's bodies to keep them cool.
- When people sweat they lose water and **electrolytes**.
    - Electrolytes are chemicals that your body needs to function
- More people die from heat than any other weather related emergencies.

Who is Extreme Heat Most Dangerous To?

- Some people are at more risk from heat than others:
  - Older people
  - Children
  - People with disabilities
  - People who work outside
  - People who are homeless
  - People in institutions and prisons
  - People who live in very hot places

Safety Fact Sheets

Why are People with I/DD at Greater Risk?

- Medical conditions/medications
- Living situations
  - Insecure housing, group homes/institutions
- High-risk jobs
  - Outdoor work
  - Limited cooling (like warehouses)

Why are People with I/DD at Greater Risk?

- Communication disabilities
  - Hard to communicate heat-related distress
  - Behavior changes labeled “challenging”

Why are People with I/DD at Greater Risk?

- Knowledge of heat dangers
  - Individuals
  - Supporters/caregivers
  - Providers
- Lack of accessible information

Steps to Stay Safe

- Making a heat safety plan
    - Know how you will communicate
- Staying hydrated
- Wearing sunscreen
- Getting healthcare if you feel sick

How to Stay Cool

- How to access air conditioning
  - Finding a cooling center
  - State subsidies for getting home air conditioning
- Other strategies for staying cool

Where to Get Help

- Independent Living Centers
- 211 and 311
- Disability rights organizations (for heat issues in institutions)
- DD councils
- Disaster hotlines

Cooling the Crisis: A Policy Brief

Why We Created This Brief

Extreme heat is a deadly emergency:

- Extreme heat is the #1 weather-related cause of death in the U.S.
- People with disabilities are disproportionately impacted
- People with I/DD face additional risks

Why We Created This Brief

Yet heat emergencies are often not planned for with disabled people in mind.

We need to change this!

Who is this guide for?

This brief was written for:

- Disability advocates
- Disability rights attorneys
- Policymakers
- Public health officials
- Anyone who wants to better understand and address extreme heat risks for people with I/DD.

How the Brief Is Organized

The brief moves from understanding the problem to changing it.

Understanding the problem:

- Definitions and terms
- What we know about the disproportionate impact of heat
- Why heat can be more dangerous for people with I/DD

How the Brief Is Organized

Changing the problem:

- Policies and structural factors that increase risk
- Conclusion and call to action

First, We Explain the Problem

In Section II: Lack of Awareness, we look at why extreme heat is not taken as seriously as other disasters.

First, We Explain the Problem

In Section II, we go over:

- Gaps in public health messaging
- Lack of disability-specific heat information
- Limited awareness among policymakers and advocates
- The consequences of leaving people with I/DD out of planning

Then We Go Into Some Reasons Heat is Dangerous

Section III covers disability-related and environmental factors, such as:

- Heat sensitivity
- Mobility
- Communication
- Medication
- Power-dependent medical equipment
- Mental health
- Power outages

The Heart of the Brief

Section IV: Policies, Structural Factors, and Social Dynamics looks at major risk factors:

- Intersectionality
- Disability exclusion
- Poverty
- Being unhoused
- Schools without adequate cooling
- Segregated congregate settings
- Prisons and jails

What Do the Recommendations Look Like?

Examples include:

- Accessible and actionable heat information
- Accessible cooling centers
- Accessible transportation
- Funding cooling equipment
- Disability-led heat planning

What Do the Recommendations Look Like?

- Compensated decision-making roles for people with I/DD
- Heat protections in schools
- Stronger protections in congregate settings
- Community partnerships between disability organizations and government

What We Hope You Do With These Resources

Read them. Share them. Use them.

Bring it into:

- Heat planning
- Public health work
- Disability advocacy
- Emergency management
- Policy development
- Community conversations

What We Hope You Do Next

And most importantly:

Bring people with I/DD to the table.

The brief explicitly calls for disability leadership and shared decision-making throughout heat planning and implementation.

Heat, Disability, and Climate Safety

Hari Srinivasan

When Heat Warnings Are Not Enough

- Heat is becoming more dangerous
- Disabled people are affected differently
- What does real safety look like?

Heat Is Already Here

- At home, work and school
- On buses and trains
- Heat can make people very sick

Today’s Talk Is Based On My Paper

- Silent Signals: Autism, Disability and Climate Safety
- Research and Lived Experience



When The Sky Turned Orange

- I grew up in San Francisco
- Wildfire smoke changed everyday life
- The air was dangerous to breathe



Where do the Autistic Crips go?

- A poem I wrote during the wildfire season (on my blog)
- “Where will I go if this happens to me?”
- “How do you prepare for sensory sensitivities and anxiety?”

Access Is More Than an Open Door

- Can people use the space?
- Can people get what they need?



Getting There Is Part Of Access

- A ride to safety
- Accessible transportation
- Bring needed supports

Disability Does Not Automatically Mean Danger

- Not automatically unsafe
- Warnings and cooling
- Missing support
- Not being believed



Heat Advice Assumes a Certain Kind of Body

- Notice body signals
- Know you are getting sick
- Respond quickly

Heat Advice Assumes a Certain Kind of Life

- Safe Housing
- Air conditioning
- Money for electricity
- Time and someone to call

Climate Safety is a Chain

- Heat exposure
- Notice Danger
- Take Action
- Get Support

A Warning Is Not a Plan

- A warning is information
- People need a way to act
- Support must be ready

The Body Responds Before We Notice

- The body tries to cool itself
- We sweat
- Body temperature can rise
- Thermoregulation

A Science Word: Interoception

- Noticing signals inside your body
- Thirst
- Pain, tiredness, or overheating

When You Don’t Notice

- I was outside in extreme heat
- I did not realize I was overheating
- I was close to heat stroke

Autistic People May Experience Heat Differently

- Some feel heat strongly
- Some notice it later
- Different bodies, different needs

Communication And Behavior Can Be Heat Signals

- Stress can make communication harder
- People communicate in different ways
- Changes in behavior can matter



Safety Needs More Than One Alarm

- Weather alerts
- Regular check-ins
- Cooling plans
- Support people

Silent Signals Shows What Plans Miss

- Heat includes the body
- Notice danger
- Understand danger
- Get support

What Plans Miss

- Disabled people are called “at-risk”
- But maybe left out of plans
- Important knowledge gets missed

The AAIR Framework

- Access
- Agency
- Innovation
- Recovery

Access

- Usable warnings
- Cooling
- Healthcare and emergency services

Agency

- A real say in decisions
- Help design the plan
- Shape what happens next

Innovation

- Learn from disabled people
- Learn from communities
- Support new ideas

Recovery

- Keep supports going
- Replace what was lost
- Help people rebuild

AAIR changes the question

- Not just “Who is at risk?”
- Ask: What gets in the way?
- Build more than one path to safety

Safety is a Shared Responsibility

- Disabled people and families
- Cities and organizations
- Everyone has a role

Four Questions for Every Plan

- Who may not get this warning?
- Who may not be able to act?
- Who may not use this space?
- Were disabled people involved?

Climate Safety Must Include Everyone

- Different bodies
- Different communication styles
- More than one path to safety

Q&A

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Your Feedback Helps Us



https://qrco.de/bgyr9v

Thanks for listening!
Any questions?

Autistic Self Advocacy Network

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The Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies

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