From Risk to Resilience:
Beating Extreme Heat in Atlanta Together

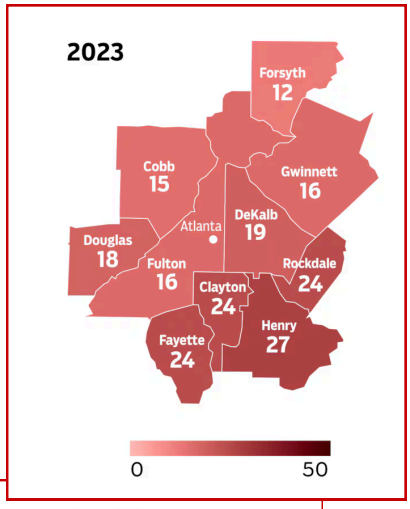
Informational Brief for Local Decisionmakers

Introduction

As metro Atlanta residents, we are feeling the heat. Affected community members representing Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, and Fulton counties came together to think about ways to lower heat-related illness in their neighborhoods. This document explains some of the **ideas the group had to help keep our communities safe with examples of how they have been successfully implemented in other U.S. cities.**

What is extreme heat and why does it matter?

Extreme heat means the weather is much hotter than usual for that place and time of year. **In Atlanta, days over 100˚F are expected to double by the year 2053.**[1] This matters to our communities because **being exposed to extreme heat can make people sick.**[2]



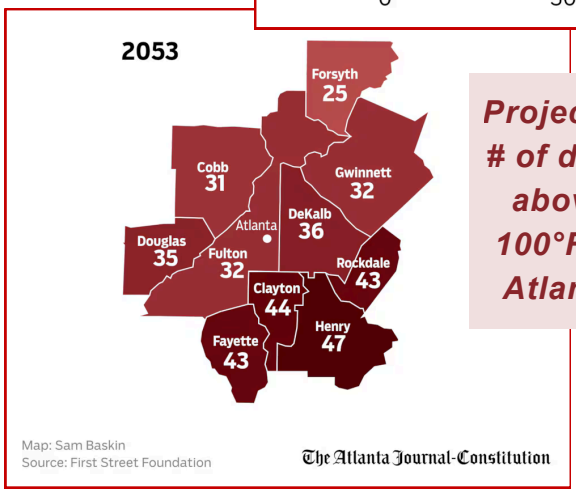
Extreme heat poses urgent health risks!

"Heat-related illness" includes:[2]

- Heat rash
- Heat exhaustion
- Heat stroke

*Being exposed to extreme heat can also **make health problems worse** like:*[2]

- Diabetes
- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- Asthma



Projected # of days above 100°F in Atlanta

Example interventions to promote heat resilience from U.S. cities

- Increasing community participation in local governance
- Training for outdoor workers
- Transportation to cooling centers
- Community outreach events
- Integrating heat safety into school curriculum
- Student community service projects
- Expanding energy assistance programs
- Expanding access to water during heat waves
- Expanding access to healthy food

The bottom line: As temperatures increase, so does risk to our health and wellbeing.

Successful solutions that have been implemented in U.S. cities:

Increasing community participation in local governance to promote awareness and needed changes to reduce exposure to extreme heat.

Example: Collaborations between communities and governments have led to improved policy-making, stronger local networks, and successful strategy implementation in numerous cities and counties across the U.S. including Columbus, New Orleans, and Tulsa.[3,4]

Training outdoor workers and employers on heat safety, monitoring high temperatures, and adapting work practices.

Example: Heat illness prevention protocols, like the 2009-2017 Central Texas voluntary Heat Stress Awareness Program, have effectively reduced occupational illness, lowered workers' compensation costs, and saved lives.[5,6]

There are **1.8 MILLION*** GA workers in high heat risk industries.[7]

Georgia does not have an occupational heat safety standard.

States that do: Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Colorado, Minnesota, Maryland

*1,791,797 workers in industries with the highest average heat-related deaths per year[7]

Offering transportation to cooling centers.

Example: Cooling centers have been instrumental in reducing heat-related illness, emergency department visits, and even preventing heat-related deaths.[8] Cooling centers are a relatively low-cost and successful strategy to reduce exposure but many people need a way to get to them. During heat waves, free shuttle services can provide vital access to these resources, helping more people avoid emergency rooms and make it safely through the heat.

The City of Atlanta and Dekalb County make public libraries and recreation centers available to be used as cooling centers during heat advisories, offering bottled water and water fountains.

Local organizations Frontline Response and A Home for Everyone in DeKalb have provided limited transportation to cooling centers. Improving access is vital for residents in need of these services.

Successful solutions that have been implemented in U.S. cities:

Fostering connection through community outreach events.

Example: In cities like Detroit, New York City, Philadelphia, Phoenix, and Spokane, regular community meetings and check-ins have been shown to increase **life-saving** actions like staying hydrated, using fans, and checking in on neighbors.[9,10] In Knoxville, "neighbor buddy systems" are being researched as a potential strategy to keep people safe from the impacts of weather extremes.[11]

Awareness campaigns and outreach events in community spaces (e.g., libraries, parks, recreation centers) foster connection and provide opportunities to share resources and information before, during, and after extreme heat events.[9,10]

Teaching young people how to reduce the health risks of extreme heat by **incorporating heat safety education into classroom curricula.**

Example: A two-week summer program in Roanoke, Virginia helped youth understand the impacts of heat in their community and brainstorm ways to keep their community safe based on examples from other cities like cooling centers, water stations, energy subsidies, tree planting, and public awareness campaigns.[12] A similar project in rural North Carolina project reported greater knowledge of heat-related illness prevention and treatment among youth.[13]

Supporting student community service projects on heat resilience allows students to strengthen their communities while gaining mentorship and leadership skills.

Example: An after-school mentorship program in Florida paired high schoolers with elementary students to investigate challenges and solutions to keep their communities safe. In response to extreme heat, the students designed a storybook where the characters planted trees to cool down their neighborhood and protect themselves from the dangers of heat-related illness.[14]

Other ideas from the community group include students distributing emergency supplies and personal protective equipment, conducting heat-mapping projects, and assisting neighbors!

Successful solutions that have been implemented in U.S. cities:

Expanding energy assistance programs help households afford cooling during extreme heat, which can reduce health risks and prevent dangerous trade-offs like skipping meals or medications.

Example: Many studies have documented the concerns residents have with high electricity bills associated with higher use of fans and portable AC units.[15,16] Expanding programs like the Georgia Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) can help more people with home energy bills, energy crises, and weatherization and minor energy-related home repairs.[17]

Ensuring every person stays hydrated by **expanding access to water during heat waves.**

Example: Phoenix and New York City have installed hydration stations in and around public facilities (libraries, public transit stations, recreation centers, fire stations) that provide critical access to water during extreme heat events.[8,10] The City of Atlanta and Dekalb County offer bottled water and water fountains at active cooling centers.

Extreme heat worsens food insecurity by straining household budgets and reducing work hours or productivity. **Expanding healthy food access** can decrease financial stress, promote health and wellbeing, and support physical resilience to rising temperatures.[18]

Example: In California, expanding funding for summer food assistance programs effectively buffers the impacts of food spending and promotes health and nutrition, especially for households with children during the summer when school meals end.[19]

Food assistance programs across the country see increased demand during severe weather events and extreme temperatures.[18,20] Food banks and pantries in California, Louisiana, New York, Tennessee, and Texas have provided extra food assistance during heat emergencies.[20-23] Organizations like MUST Ministries in Marietta and meal delivery services like Meals on Wheels of Middle Georgia have helped keep Georgians fed during extreme temperatures.[24]

Conclusion

Extreme heat poses urgent health risks and can worsen existing health conditions. The strategies the community members presented throughout this document have been successfully adopted across the country to reduce the impacts of extreme heat. These solutions help keep people cool and out of the hospital or emergency room for heat-related illnesses.

It's important to build Atlanta's resilience as temperatures continue to rise. Incorporating these ideas can strengthen our city's response and capacity to reduce heat-related illness through preventative measures that keep our communities safe, healthy, productive, and happy.

Community-informed and -driven action today will build a safer and healthier tomorrow.

Contact information for follow up:

Community member:

_____

Phone number and/or email:

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Please follow up with me about this informational brief.

Georgia Resident Resources Toolkit

Scan QR code or visit https://tinyurl.com/GAresidentheat

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