

Cooling Centers/Shelters Guidance

Community-based organizations may be interested to open their facility as a cooling location, center, or shelter for people during extreme heat. Here is what you need to know:

- **Cooling Location:** An air-conditioned location open to the public with water often available. These spaces are open during the hottest part of the day only and do not operate for 24 hours. Community partners, such as houses of worship, may operate Cooling Locations.
- **Cooling Center:** A location with air conditioning, cooling resources, water, food, and support services. These locations operate during the hottest part of the day only.
- **Cooling Shelter:** A location with air conditioning, cooling resources, water, food, and support services. These locations are similar to Cooling Centers, but operate for 24-hours.

The County works with the National Weather Service and considers Heat Risk, and Heat Advisories when deciding when to issue health warnings and open cooling spaces. We take into consideration not only how hot it gets during the day, but whether the nights cool down, how many hot days we expect in a row and whether it's earlier or later in the summer season.

During most hot days, agencies will promote cool spaces such as libraries and city pools. But there are times when agencies will decide to open cooling centers. One difference is that cooling centers offer snacks or a meal.

Before you decide

Organizations weighing this decision should consider costs of operation (Manpower and Logistical), resource availability, transportation needs, communication methods, and scheduling prior to opening a cooling space.

Opening a cooling space, center or shelter takes a lot of coordination. Before you decide, find out if someone has already opened a cooling location near you.

If you find that there is already a cooling location near you, consider spreading the word to promote it among people who might need that service, or volunteer to help. Also consider means for transportation to and from a cooling center/shelter.

Some organizations open their buildings as cooling spaces or centers after the normal business day is over, and welcome people to come in and cool down from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. Here are some things to consider:

Your location

Make sure the location has good and reliable air conditioning. The location should also be accessible to people with disabilities and people who use mobility devices. Ensure that enough space is available to maintain six feet of physical distance between household groups, and limit the number of people who access the location accordingly.

Supplies for a cooling location

Consider basic supplies to help meet the needs of guests who will visit your space:

- Adequate tables and chairs
- Washcloths or quick-drying cooling towels
- Plenty of chilled bottled water
- Signs displaying operating hours, rules and on-site assistance
- Basic First-Aid supplies
- A power strip so visitors can charge phones or electronic devices
- Trash cans and extra heavy-duty trash bags
- Fans to increase ventilation

Some activities you can offer are coloring, crosswords, books, playing cards and movies. This can help create a feeling of trust and comfort, and keep kids happy. If you plan to offer toys that can be shared, be sure to sanitize between each use following CDC guidance (linked above).

Promote good hand hygiene

- Hand sanitizer
- Cleaning supplies for high-touch surfaces.

Pets

Don't let pets become a barrier for seeking relief from the heat. Work with local animal services groups to consider ways to allow pets in your space.

Consider supplies you might want on hand to support our four-legged guests:

- Kennels or spaces for individuals to sit separately with animals
- Bowls for water and pet food
- Leashes and/or collars for use inside
- Temporary or disposable litter boxes and dog waste bags

Food

Consider providing pre-packaged sandwiches and snacks such as individually-wrapped granola bars and fruit. Remember a supply of napkins and plates.

Food safety practices

- Refrigerate or freeze perishable food within 2 hours of shopping (1 hour when the temperature is above 90 degrees)
- Keep foods in the refrigerator
- If food is mistakenly left out, discard if it has been left out at room temperature for more than 2 hours (or 1 hour when the temperature is above 90 degrees)
- Wash hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food, and perform a double hand-wash after using the bathroom, changing diapers, smoking, or handling pets.
- Serve food in individual portions, after determining what visitors would like. Do not allow visitors to grab sandwiches on their own. Norovirus and other significant viruses spread quickly.

Closing

Hours of operation should be clearly posted and communicated with visitors as they arrive. If, when you close, a visitor needs information about other resources, or other alternative resources nearby.

It is also important to remember that not everyone who needs respite from the heat will have somewhere to go when you close. Consider having a conversation with those who are staffing your site during a closing shift about the options for those with no home to go to, and make a plan for the possible emotional impacts of this important and lifesaving work.

Spread the word

If you decide to open a location of your own, let people know!

Organizations interested in being included in the County's online map of cool places, can notify the County Office of Emergency Management.

Cooling locations promoted by the County must provide services free of charge and place no requirements on guests, such as promotion of religion or prayer or any cost for entry. Organizations are also encouraged to follow recommended hours of operation (staying open until at least 9 p.m.), and to stay open for all promoted days and hours of operation.