

Bushfire Preparedness

The Bureau of Meteorology declared that an El Niño and a positive Indian Ocean Dipole are underway.

These two climate drivers, typically mean warmer and drier temperatures, leading to an increased fire danger period. This document has been created to provide help to health services to be bushfire ready.

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Update your emergency response documents

Consider the [Emergency Response Planning Tool](#) (free to general practices until December) and ensure staff are familiar with it. If using a paper system, store a copy off site. This will not only help you to stay focused and respond under pressure but get your business back up and running more quickly.

Consider the role of your practice in an emergency

RACGP's [emergency response in general practice document](#) includes tips for practices to consider.

Know the fire rating

Victoria: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/warnings-restrictions/total-fire-bans-fire-danger-ratings>

Safeguard your building

Prepare your site by removing excess rubbish, litter and leaves and keeping your grass short.

Protect your data

Ensure that your practice software is backed up, ideally to the cloud, to reduce the risk of data loss.
Upload patient information to MHR

Plan for power outages, water supply, gas

Consider alternate power sources in the event of power outages for cold chain management, or clinical record access. Could you relocate vaccine / medicines or access a generator if needed?

Communicate service closures or impacts

Use social media and other platforms. Prepare a message or email to patients using appointment confirmation system. Consider sending other important alerts, for example: to patients with asthma during epidemic thunderstorm asthma days.

Plan staffing

In the event of no or reduced access to your site or staff absences, consider alternate models of work, alternate sites and equipment needs (ERPT can guide you through these considerations):

- Is it safe for practitioners to work remotely from home? Explore if there are alternate health services or locations that they could work from.
- Does the practice have a telehealth platform that practitioners can use remotely?
- Are the practitioners set up with ePrescribing so patients can obtain scripts immediately and remotely? Ensure paper scripts/prescribing pads are also available in the event that no internet is available.
- Does the practice have an alternate contact number, or can you temporarily divert your practice number, so patients can call if the building is closed, and the phone system is inaccessible?
- Can admin and clinical staff access your practice management and clinical software systems off site to facilitate remote models of care?
- Ensure clinicians are able to create pathology and imaging requests if working remotely.

Plan how to manage emergencies

See RACGP's [managing emergencies in general practice](#): a guide for preparation, response and recovery

Keep up to date with alerts and information

- [Subscribe](#) to Heat and thunderstorm asthma alerts
- Learn more about bushfires and asthma [here](#)
- Prepare for or report [gas and electrical outages](#)
- Road closures [VicRoads - VicTraffic](#)

Have emergency response kits ready

- Torches in event of power outages and spare batteries.
- Important documents
- N95 Masks for bushfire smoke
- Contact lists for all staff and contractors.
- Burns kit
- Practice mobile, which may provide temporary internet access through mobile data hotspot
- Eye wash kit
- Respiratory medications – e.g. bronchodilators, tools to deliver
- Vulnerable population list of patients ready and handy
- Hard copy radiology and pathology requests
- Script pads
- Water

Join the emergency volunteer list

If you have capacity to support in an emergency event, register your interest using the [online form](#).

Training/ Emergency exercises

Undertake mock training incidents to ensure staff are competent and aware of their roles in the event of an emergency.

Encourage patients to be fire ready

Fire Ready Kit

In Victoria:

Fire Ready Kit: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/before-and-during-a-fire/fire-ready-kit>

Emergency app: www.emergency.vic.gov.au

Advise patients to plan in advance, so they do not run out of medications during an emergency, particularly if they are unable to access the local pharmacy or cannot travel to an alternate location.

Other useful links:

FAQ & Resources from Department Bushfire preparedness

- [Using air conditioners when it's smoky outside - Better Health Channel](#)
- [after-a-fire-using-your-personal-protective-kit.docx \(live.com\)](#)
- [bushfire-guidelines-for-use-face-masks.docx \(live.com\)](#)
- [after-a-fire-private-drinking-water-and-water-tank-safety-february-2021.docx \(live.com\)](#)
- [Service continuity and emergency events in aged care | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](#)
- [CFA Bushfire Plan Leave Early \(2022\).pdf.aspx](#)
- [Your Local Area - Info and Advice | CFA \(Country Fire Authority\)](#)
- Vic Emergency - [Prepare and Get Ready - VicEmergency](#)
- Heat health warning subscribers can manage their subscriptions at [Subscribe to heat health warnings](#).
- Survive the heat partner kit: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/survive-heat-media-kit>
- Emergency preparedness in residential aged care services: <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/residential-aged-care/emergency-preparedness-in-residential-aged-care-services>
- The role and Inclusion of general practitioners in evacuation centres: <https://www.racgp.org.au/FSDDEV/media/documents/Advocacy/RACGP-GPs-in-evacuation-centres-guidelines-May-2023.pdf>
- [RACGP Summer Planning Toolkit](#)

Resources to share with patients

- My Health Record: <https://www.digitalhealth.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/my-health-record>
- Survive the heat: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/campaigns/survive-heat>
- Heat related illness and preventing heatstroke: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/heat-stress-preventing-heatstroke>
- How to cope and stay safe in extreme heat: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/how-to-cope-and-stay-safe-in-extreme-heat>
- Bushfires and asthma: <https://www.nationalasthma.org.au/living-with-asthma/resources/patients-carers/factsheets/bushfires-and-asthma>
- Smoke and your health: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bushfiresmoke>
- Air quality: <https://www.epa.vic.gov.au/for-community/airwatch>
- Road closures - Victoria: <https://traffic.vicroads.vic.gov.au/>
- Bureau of Meteorology: <http://www.bom.gov.au/>
- Better Health Channel bushfire fact sheets and advice: <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/search?q=bushfire>

Contact us

For more information or support email practicesupport@emphn.org.au