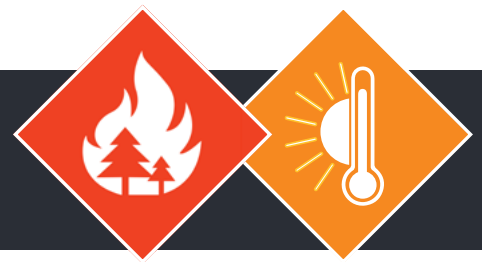


# Internal Communication and Team Coordination



**Focus:** *How staff and volunteers function as a unified team during an active event.*

Impacts from extreme heat and wildfire smoke can escalate quickly. To support your team in responding effectively, use simple, repeatable systems that keep every staff member and volunteer clear on the plan, their role and the current risk level. Strong internal coordination does not require complex technology. It requires clarity: clear ownership of weather monitoring, clear communication channels across shifts and clear processes for rapid team decision-making. When clinics and health centers institutionalize these practices, they reduce stress, increase efficiency and ensure task accountability.



## At a glance:

- **Check the forecast and monitor conditions:** Integrate regular weather, wildfire incident and local air quality monitor updates into your standing team meetings leading up to high-risk seasons.
- **Centralize communication tools:** Use physical “communication books” or digital hubs in high-traffic areas to keep rotating shifts and volunteers updated.
- **Normalize ad hoc staff huddles:** Use short, multidisciplinary meetings to quickly determine action on emerging patient care needs during emergencies.

## 1 Check the forecast to incorporate hazard outlook information into standing meetings and determine when you will act.

Monitoring the weather is not enough. Forecast information must trigger operational action. Clinics and health centers can do this by assigning responsibility for checking the weather and the Air Quality Index (AQI) daily, discussing forecast implications in standing meetings and establishing pre-defined activation thresholds that prompt timely response actions.

### Key takeaways:

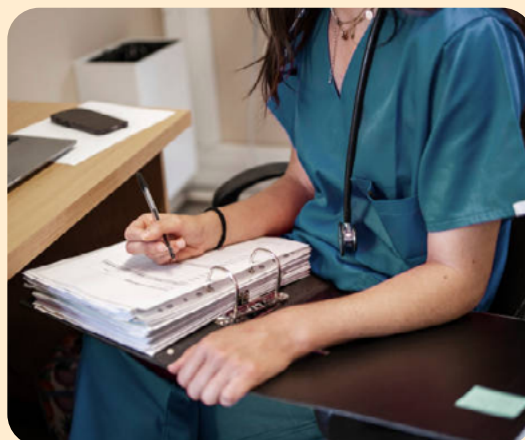
- **Identify a point person:** Assign a team member to be the weather lead to check the local weather and AQI during high-risk seasons.
- **Update each other:** Incorporate a brief weather or wildfire smoke event status report into existing standing meetings to keep the team informed.
- **Establish clear triggers:** Decide in advance which temperature or AQI levels will prompt specific internal protocols. For heat, consider factors such as humidity, intensity and duration.

## 2 Centralize staff communication tools.

Managing multiple shifts and rotating volunteers makes it difficult to keep everyone on the same page. To ensure that health education becomes the responsibility of all staff, clinics and health centers have created communication channels to keep information visible and accessible.

### The reception desk communication book.

One clinic found that because staff and volunteers arrived at different times, those on later shifts were often unaware of the day's specific focus or operational changes. To solve this, they established a physical "communication book" placed at the reception desk. They implemented a protocol where checking this book was the first thing staff did upon arrival. This low-tech solution proved effective for managing rotating volunteers and multiple shifts without the need for constant, formal meetings.



## Key takeaways:

- **Centralize information:** Use a physical book or digital hub in a high-traffic area to prevent missed messages.
- **Make check-ins mandatory:** Set a clear expectation that reviewing the hub is the first task of every shift.
- **Keep it simple:** Use tools that require no specialized training or technology so that temporary staff and volunteers can be updated instantly.

## 3 Normalize ad hoc staff meetings.

During extreme weather events, the clinic environment is often chaotic and too busy for formalized meetings. Facilities have found that huddles, which are short meetings of a multidisciplinary team of staff (nurses, doctors, pharmacists, etc.) to discuss and quickly determine action on emerging patient care needs, are a time-saving alternative to formalized staff meetings during extreme heat events.

### Starting a team huddle.

During a severe heat wave, one health center's staff needed a way to track their most vulnerable patients without pulling the team away from care for long periods. They used huddles to ask quick questions about the welfare of specific subgroups. These sessions allowed the team to determine who had been contacted and who needed immediate care, ensuring that senior patients and those with special needs were managed efficiently during the surge.



## Key takeaways:

- **Use impromptu huddles:** Replace long meetings with quick check-ins to quickly determine action on patient care.
- **Identify vulnerable groups:** Use the time specifically to identify high-risk populations, including older adults.
- **Stay multidisciplinary:** Involve nurses, doctors and pharmacists to enable coordinated and timely clinical decision-making.



## Summary checklist for clinics or health centers

- Weather monitoring lead:** Have you designated a specific staff member to track the Heat Index (“feels like” temperature) and Air Quality Index (AQI) daily so that weather forecast monitoring is a formal responsibility rather than an assumed task?
- Forecast-informed planning:** Are weather forecast updates a standing agenda item in your existing meetings to ensure the whole team stays ahead of upcoming high-risk windows?
- Operational thresholds:** Have you defined the specific “if/then” triggers (e.g., an AQI over 150 or a Heat Index over 90°F) that officially activate your facility’s response protocols?
- Event huddles:** Do you have a plan to hold short, daily huddles during active extreme heat or wildfire smoke events to coordinate staff safety and adjust patient outreach in real-time?