

# RMG decision

## Alert phase heat and ozone concentration

### Covid-19 epidemic

08.08.2020

Since the criteria for temperature and ozone concentration for the alert phase have been reached on 7/8 and in the context of the COVID-19 epidemic, needing to find a balance between measures recommended in the heat plan and for limiting COVID-19 transmission, the RMG decides after electronic consultation and based on the RAG Primary Risk Assessment Heat and Ozone, 07 August 2020, to decree a **heat and ozone alert phase**.

The following actions are recommended:

At regional level, the recommended measures in existing heat plans should be followed. The actions recommended below concern mainly measures in the heat plan that could be difficult to implement during the COVID-19 epidemic, as highlighted in a RAG advice on heat and COVID-19 from 26/05/20, see [http://covid-19.sciensano.be/sites/default/files/Covid19/20200527\\_PRA\\_COVID%20%26%20plan%20canicule.pdf](http://covid-19.sciensano.be/sites/default/files/Covid19/20200527_PRA_COVID%20%26%20plan%20canicule.pdf)

- A clear communication is needed on the importance to continue wearing a face mask, despite the heat. The use of chirurgical masks or masks made of a material that allows better ventilation, such as cotton and without the use of an additional filter could be promoted. For intensive sports activities (that are discouraged and should only be conducted in the morning or evening) outdoors and in non-crowded areas (e.g. running and cycling), the obligation to wear a face mask could be overruled by the local authorities. In case of urgent heat stress, the mask can be temporarily left off, in conditions COVID-safe to the person and his environment). Masks may not be made wet and should be changed more often, especially once wet with sweat.
- Easy access to water, especially in an urban setting; drinking water fountains that have been closed because of COVID-19 must be reopened (taking hygiene measures, especially with regards to high touch surfaces, into account, see also <https://www.warmedagen.be/warmte-en-het-coronavirus>); bars and restaurants must be encouraged to provide free tap water to their clients; drinking water should be provided in case of traffic jams or public transport problems.
- Measures should be taken at places where queuing can be expected (supermarkets before entrance in the shop, public transport) to provide shadow/shelter while waiting.

- In nursing homes, persons requiring isolation/quarantine because of COVID-19 the next few days should preferably be isolated in the coolest areas/rooms of the institution as far as possible. If no case has been reported in the nursing home during the past 2 weeks, social distancing is of lower priority than giving access to the residents to a cool place, and fans can be used when a person is alone in a room and no care is given (see also further). Visits from family should not be organised outside during the alert phase, but alternatives inside in cool places should be looked for (chapel, cafeteria, ...). More specific recommendations are available here: <https://www.zorg-en-gezondheid.be/sites/default/files/atoms/files/Tijdelijke%20maatregelen%20ouderenzorg%20-%20Update%2023-07-2020%20DEF.pdf>
- Sufficient staff must be guaranteed and if necessary extra support to the staff will be needed in residential collectivities with vulnerable population (nursing homes, hospitals, ...) to provide the residents with the necessary refreshment (additional water rounds, encourage people to drink footbaths,...), through students or volunteers (e.g volunteers or red cross, provide information on possibility to contact them through the website <https://www.helpdehelpers.be/>). These persons must be informed about correct use of PPE when working in a nursing home and sufficient PPE should be made available. A screening PCR test at entrance is not recommended/not useful.
- Particular attention should be given to the elderly living alone at home (regular contact to question the state of health, as planned in the heat plans and already sometimes implemented in the context of COVID-19).
- Ventilation of rooms: although in the heat plan it is recommended to keep indoor spaces closed to keep the heat out, it is important to ventilate the spaces in the context of COVID-19. This should be done preferably in the early morning and evening, while the room is empty.
- Air currents (f.i. from ventilators, air-conditioning units, ...) should be avoided, because they can spread infective droplets over a larger area. The possible use of these cooling devices should be evaluated case by case considering urgency of heat effect to COVID-transfer. Social distancing is important in this case, and avoiding air flows from one person to another, or continuous resuspension of indoor air. See also HGR-CSS advice on ventilation: <https://www.health.belgium.be/nl/advies-9599-ventilatie>
- Public places with air conditioning (museum, cinema, library...) should allow access to those most vulnerable to the heat, while respecting social distancing measures. A system with reservation of time spots could be used to avoid crowding. Increased shadow places should be provided at outdoor public places.
- Swimming is only possible where it is allowed (f.i. check [www.kwaliteitzwemwater.be](http://www.kwaliteitzwemwater.be)).
- Youth camps should be informed on the importance of drinking enough water and installing sleeping places in shady areas (if possible). (Heavy) physical activities should be avoided, especially during the hottest hours of the day
- If needed, drinking water should be transported to the camp in bulk.

- Access to showers, cool public places and accommodation centres should be provided to homeless people, with respect of social distancing measures.

In the event of major problems in a collectivity or municipality to cool down institutions and residents, municipal contingency plans can be initiated with the deployment of emergency services (civil protection, fire brigade, etc.).

The RMG draws attention to the fact that the necessary information is provided to the Federal Crisis Center and Crisis Centers of the Federated Entities.