

# The West Australian


**BREAKING:** New bushfire emergency warning issued for Yanchep

## Climate health inquiry: Department of Health issue warning as heatwave scorches Perth

**Joanna Delalande** The West Australian  
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 The Department of Health director general has raised concerns the public will "become complacent" to extreme heat, as the city braces for its hottest December on record. Credit: Michael Wilson/ The West Australian



Heatwaves will become an increasingly common feature of WA summers, the Department of Health has warned as Perth looks set to experience its hottest December on record.

Perth recorded a maximum of 39C about 2.30pm today, just shy of the predicted 40C.

The city is forecast to reach 41C tomorrow and Saturday and 40C on Sunday for a record-breaking December heatwave. The current record for 40C-plus days in December is two.

In giving evidence to the McGowan Government's climate health inquiry this morning the department's director general, David Russell-Weisz, said he was concerned the public would be complacent as heatwaves and hot days became more frequent.

He said people's attitudes could turn to one of "getting on with it" in the face of extreme heat.

"My concern is that people might take this as normal and therefore will become complacent," he said.

It comes as the department issued a warning for Perth for the first time since 2016 this week as the city braced for a run of record-breaking heat.

Dr Russell-Weisz said a warning had never previously been issued in December.

He said while people thought of the dangers of climate change in terms of its effects of the environment, there was little awareness of its adverse effects on individual people's health.

"We need to be better at educating people about how if we reduce our carbon footprint, your health will improve and your children and grandchildren's health will improve," he said.

"We've got to make it real to the person who lives in Midland, to your every day life.

"It's not an excuse that we're very small, we're Australia, we don't make a difference. Everybody can make a difference."

Dr Tarun Weeramanthri, who is conducting the inquiry, said a number of witnesses had raised concerns about the health effects of an increasing number of hot days not officially classified as a heatwave – especially on outdoor workers.

For the Perth metropolitan area, the heatwave trigger is defined as a three day average temperature calculation of 32C or above.

Dr Russel-Weisz also pointed to the State's heatwave hazard plan, released in October, which says each organisation must establish strategies to mitigate heat-related staff fatigue.

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