Many years ago when I was a little girl, I went shopping with my father. The shops were lovely and cool, so we got a shock when we walked outside into intense heat. We were in a heatwave.

A heatwave occurs when there are one or more days of higher than usual temperatures, and when night-time brings no cool relief. The heat is uncomfortable and makes it difficult to sleep.

The effects of global warming on our climate means we can expect higher temperatures and more hot days around Victoria.

Heatwaves can be dangerous as they are a significant health risk to people.

Heatwaves are detrimental to people and animals, contributing to heat stress and dehydration. They are also detrimental to the environment, especially our waterways.

A heatwave can affect utilities, causing power and water outages. It is common for public transport to break down during a heatwave, leaving people stranded.

Heatwaves can occur in the city, suburbs and countryside.

We can expect heatwaves to occur more frequently in Victoria, and to increase in their intensity.

Temperatures are usually higher in the city and suburbs than in the countryside. This is because many construction materials such as concrete absorb and heat from the sun, contributing to higher temperatures indoors and outdoors. Buildings retain this heat during the night, so temperatures remain high. It can take a long time for temperatures to decrease in the city.

During the 2008 - 2009 summer, many towns and cities around Victoria broke the record for days over 40. The highest temperatures were recorded at Mildura, in north-west Victoria, where they experienced twelve consecutive days of temperatures higher than 40.

Heatwaves increase the risk of bushfire, as they contribute to an extremely dry environment. They also increase the risk of damage to agricultural land, natural vegetation and soil. As the land is so dry, lightning can easily spark a bushfire. Lightning has caused bushfires in the Alpine region of north-east Victoria, near New South Wales, which later contributed to the Black Saturday bushfires.

During a heatwave, many native and non-native animals suffer, including pets. Many are unable to find a source of water and become dehydrated. Some may be rescued and taken to animal shelters, but many perish in the heat.

During the summer, heatwaves greatly increases the risk of death for people. The health effects of heat can be detrimental for anyone, but some people are particularly at risk during heatwaves.

This includes older people over 65 years of age, especially those living alone. Other people who live alone or who are homeless are at risk during a heatwave.

Pregnant women, breastfeeding women, babies and young children are at risk from the effects of heatwave. People with serious mental health issues are at risk during a heatwave,

as are people who take medication, including medication for allergies, blood pressure, heart conditions, and seizures, as well as diuretics, anti-depressant and anti-psychotic medication.

Extreme heat can adversely affect your medications.

Heatwaves can affect people with serious health conditions such as asthma, or people who are already unwell or with fever. Others at risk include people with a disability, who may not be able to identify their discomfort or thirst, or those with limited mobility such as wheelchair users. Overweight or obese people can be at risk during a heatwave. People with alcohol or drug issues can be at risk during a heatwave, as well as people doing active sports or working outside in the sun. All of these people are at high risk of negative health effects during a heatwave, but the greatest risk is to older people over 65 years of age.

Do not underestimate the detrimental effects of a heatwave, they can be dangerous.

Heatwaves present a high risk to people, animals and the environment.