



13 DEC, 2019

Climate can be bad medicine

West Australian, Perth

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Heatwaves will become an increasingly common feature of WA summers, the Department of Health warned yesterday as Perth is expected to endure its hottest December on record.

Perth recorded a maximum 39C about 2.30pm yesterday, just shy of the predicted 40C. The city is forecast to reach 41C today and tomorrow and 40C on Sunday for a record-breaking December heatwave.

The record for 40C-plus days in December is two.

Health Department director-general David Russell-Weisz told a climate health inquiry he was concerned the public would be complacent as heatwaves became more frequent. He said people's attitudes could turn to one of "getting on with it" in the face of extreme heat. It comes as the department issued a warning for residents to stay hydrated and stay indoors for the first time since 2016 this week.

Dr Russell-Weisz said a warning had never been issued in December. He said people needed to think of how climate change had adverse health effects. "We need to be better at educating people about how if we reduce our carbon footprint, your health will improve," he said.