

New Parent Emergency HVAC Playbook

Baby in the house. AC just died. It's a Birmingham July night. Here's the priority order -- fastest, safest path to a comfortable, safe sleep environment.

WHO IT IS FOR

New parents in the Birmingham metro facing an HVAC failure they don't have time to research.

WHAT IS INSIDE

The first-30-minutes priority list, infant safe-temperature science, alternative cooling that's actually safe, when it qualifies as a 911 health emergency, and the call script.

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Read online: <https://afterhourshvacr.com/downloads/new-parent-emergency-hvac-playbook/>

First -- breathe. Then read this

You have time. An infant is not in immediate danger from a typical AC failure on a summer night unless conditions are extreme. The risk window is 4-6 hours, not 30 minutes. That's enough time to make calm, smart decisions. This playbook lays them out.

Minute 0-5 -- establish the room temperature

Quick assessment:

- * Get a thermometer in the baby's room -- phone weather apps are useless; the room temp is what matters
- * Note current room temp (write it down with the time)
- * Note outdoor temp (phone weather)
- * Take note of indoor humidity if you have a meter (most smart thermostats display it)
- * Below 80 deg F in the room -- you have several hours of buffer
- * 80-85 deg F -- comfortable for adults uncomfortable but not dangerous for a healthy infant short-term
- * Over 85 deg F -- start active cooling measures immediately (next step)

Minute 5-15 -- passive cooling

Do all of these before calling anyone:

- * Close every blind and curtain -- sun load (or stored heat in walls) is the enemy
- * Turn off every interior light
- * Turn off the oven, stovetop, dryer, dishwasher
- * Run every ceiling fan -- direction should blow downward (counterclockwise in summer)
- * Open the bathroom and laundry-room doors -- usually the coolest rooms in the house
- * If outdoor temp is below 75 deg F, open shaded-side windows. Otherwise keep windows closed

Minute 15-30 -- active cooling for the baby's room

In order of preference:

- * Place a box fan or pedestal fan blowing across the crib (NOT directly at the baby -- 4-6 feet away, blowing across)
- * A wet washcloth on the back of the neck of an awake/older infant -- never on a young infant who can't move
- * Move the baby to the bottom floor of the house -- heat rises and the bottom floor will be 5-8 deg F cooler
- * Dress the baby in a single layer (cotton onesie). Skip the swaddle/sleep sack in elevated heat
- * Window AC unit if you have one -- install in any window even temporarily
- * Portable AC if you have one -- same

What is the safe temperature for an infant?

American Academy of Pediatrics guidance:

- * Optimal room temperature for an infant: 68-72 deg F
- * Acceptable range: 65-75 deg F
- * Risk zone: above 80 deg F sustained, especially with elevated humidity
- * Heat-related illness risk: above 85 deg F sustained with poor air circulation
- * For infants under 6 months who can't regulate temperature well, the upper end is more critical
- * Younger infants are at higher heat-illness risk than older babies

Active cooling alternatives ranked

If house AC is dead and won't be back soon:

- * Window AC unit -- best option. Cools one room reliably. Most hardware stores stock these. Set up in the baby's room or living area where baby will be
- * Portable AC -- works but needs window venting hose. Less efficient than window unit
- * Box fans + cool damp washcloths on adults' necks/wrists (NOT young infants' skin)
- * Move to a cooler space -- basement, garage with door cracked, family member's house, hotel
- * AVOID -- ice baths or cold water on infants. Hypothermia risk
- * AVOID -- air conditioning to under 65 deg F for an infant. Cold-stress risk

When this is a 911 call

Genuinely call 911 if the infant shows:

- * Lethargy or unresponsiveness
- * Skin hot and dry (no sweating -- sign of heat exhaustion progressing to heat stroke)
- * Skin flushed deeply red
- * Vomiting in combination with elevated temperature
- * Rapid breathing or labored breathing
- * Refusing to feed
- * Rectal temperature over 101 deg F that doesn't come down with cooling measures
- * Fontanelle (soft spot on top of head) sunken (dehydration sign)

The call script for HVAC dispatch

When you call for service, be direct:

- * "I have an infant in the home. The AC has failed. Current indoor temp is XX deg F."
- * Give name, address, contact number
- * Give the brand and rough age of the AC if you can read the data plate
- * Describe what the system is doing (outdoor unit silent, indoor running, etc.)
- * Ask: "What's the realistic ETA?"
- * If ETA is over 4 hours and indoor temp is 80 deg F+: ask about diagnostic-only over the phone, or move to alternative cooling (window unit, family/hotel)

Hydration matters

For nursing mothers and the infant:

- * Mother: drink water steadily. Heat stress reduces milk supply temporarily
- * Formula-fed infants -- small additional offers of formula
- * Breastfed infants under 6 months -- nurse on demand, more often than usual is fine
- * Older babies -- small amounts of water are OK
- * Avoid: introducing water to an exclusively breastfed infant under 6 months unless a pediatrician specifically OKs it

After the AC is fixed

Once cool again:

- * Don't plunge the room from 88 deg F to 65 deg F -- gradual is safer for everyone
- * Bring the thermostat down 2-3 deg F per hour
- * Watch the baby for any signs of cold-stress (shivering, mottled skin)
- * Return to normal sleep environment guidance: 68-72 deg F, single light layer, firm mattress

Resources to bookmark now

- * AAP HealthyChildren.org -- infant heat safety
- * Birmingham Children's Hospital -- emergency line if you need pediatric advice during a heat event
- * Local hotels with AC availability for emergencies
- * A family member or neighbor with working AC who'd host on short notice

Sources

- * American Academy of Pediatrics -- Safe Sleep and Room Temperature Guidance -- aap.org
- * CDC -- Extreme heat and infants -- cdc.gov
- * WHO -- Heat-Health Action Plans -- who.int
- * National Weather Service Birmingham -- Heat advisory thresholds -- weather.gov/bmx
- * American Red Cross -- Heat illness prevention -- redcross.org

Disclaimer

This guide is informational. It is not a substitute for licensed HVAC inspection, diagnosis, or service. Conditions vary by home and equipment. Refrigerant work, gas-line work, and high-voltage electrical work require an EPA Section 608 certified technician and a licensed HVAC contractor under Alabama law. When in doubt, call.

No pricing on this site is a quote. No response time is a guarantee. All ranges shown are observed market data, not promises.

About the author

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John has been turning wrenches on Birmingham HVAC systems for 25 years. Alabama HVAC contractor licensed, bonded, and insured. EPA Section 608 Universal certified. He has walked roofs, attics, crawlspaces, and condenser pads across every neighborhood in this metro and has written every guide on this site from the working tech's perspective -- not the salesman's.

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