

# Public Health Link

From the Chief Medical Officer for Wales

<b>Distribution:</b>	As Appendix 1
<b>From:</b>	Professor Isabel Oliver, Chief Medical Officer
<b>Date:</b>	5 May 2026
<b>Reference:</b>	CEM/CMO/2026/03
<b>Category:</b>	Climate Adaptation
<b>Title:</b>	Heat Health Risk: Advice Note for Wales Health and Social Care System Partners
<b>What is this about:</b>	This advice is intended to help Health and Social Care (HSC) system partners improve their plans and preparations for hot weather scenarios and urge further actions to prevent or reduce risks to health, enabling a rapid and effective response when needed and the communication of key messages to HSC system partners.
<b>Why has it been sent:</b>	The <a href="#">UK Climate Change Risk Assessment</a> has suggested that summers will get progressively hotter, with expectations of more extreme or unusually hot spells and heatwaves.  The <a href="#">Climate Adaptation Strategy for Wales 2024</a> sets out the overarching strategy for adaptation planning, including for the health and social care sector (see section 5.7 and page 57), relating to impacts from heat.

Dear Colleagues

## Context

The adverse effects of hot weather on health can occur quickly, within a couple of days of temperatures rising but a lot of these effects are avoidable. Good planning and preparedness is essential to reduce risks of harm to vulnerable individuals and impacts on essential services.

My predecessor Sir Frank Atherton wrote to you previously, on [7 July 2022](#), [3 July 2023](#) and [24 July 2024](#), setting out the Welsh Government's expectation that Health and Social Care (HSC) system partners develop plans to address risks arising from hot weather. He said that these plans should be relevant year-round to ensure that there is preparedness and resilience ahead of hot weather occurring, as well as in response to specific events. I wrote to you on [18 June 2025](#) reiterating this expectation.

I trust that you will now all have such plans in place to avoid harm.

This advice note is intended to help you improve your plans and preparations for hot weather scenarios and urge further actions to prevent or reduce risks to health, enabling a rapid and

effective response when needed and the communication of key messages to others with caring responsibilities (e.g. unpaid carers).

## Heat health risks

Prolonged periods of hot or unusually hot weather can pose serious risks to health but heat-related ill health and mortality is largely preventable. Those most at risk include older people, young children, and those with pre-existing health conditions. The health risks of hot weather on people, including patients and vulnerable groups, can put pressure on the HSC system.

Direct health effects from hot weather include heat stress and exhaustion that may present with tiredness, headache dizziness, cramps, rashes, dizziness, fainting (often due to dehydration), swelling (mainly ankles), and may progress to heatstroke. There may also be indirect effects for example from sleep disruption or wider consequences of hot weather episodes, such as deterioration of air and water quality, and water sufficiency and wildfires with the consequent impact on health.

As the climate changes, adaptation strategies to reduce heat stress such as wider provision of shade, cool spaces and good access to cool drinking water are essential to maintain public wellbeing.<sup>1</sup>

## Met Office advice and warnings

Previous letters drew your attention to the UK-wide National Severe Weather Warning Service (NSWWS) operated by the Met Office, which provides warnings of severe or hazardous weather, including heat, which may cause danger to life or widespread disruption in Wales. They urged you to register to receive NSWWS warnings [here](#).

They also advised you that the Met Office may issue informal forecasts and advice relating to Wales in advance of official NSWWS warnings being issued, and as best practice you should request this advice direct from the Met Office by contacting [wales.cca@metoffice.gov.uk](mailto:wales.cca@metoffice.gov.uk). All registered agencies will receive such advice and warnings from the Met Office at the same time, and HSC partner agencies should consider collectively discussing any early 'heads-up' advice/intelligence from the Met Office and use it to inform their actions.

Additional information about Met Office heat alerts may be found in my predecessor's [previous correspondence](#) on the subject.

## Health and Social Care system partner action

**You should now have plans in place, informed by a risk assessment, to address identified risks arising from hot weather.** These plans will be relevant year-round to ensure that there is preparedness and resilience ahead of hot weather occurring, as well as in response to specific events.

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<sup>1</sup> The Welsh Government has recently published factsheets on [summertime overheating in highly insulated homes](#), [summertime overheating in post 1985 properties](#) (including older buildings converted into flats), and [summertime relative humidity in older properties](#).

## ***Year-round preparedness and resilience***

Your plans, informed by a risk assessment, should have identified and now be driving **ongoing environmental improvements** to reduce risks and increase safety for patients, staff and other users in hot weather. This may include checking that windows can be easily shaded and opened, increasing shading outdoors, insulating buildings or painting them with reflective paint, maintaining cooling ventilation and air conditioning systems, creating cool rooms inside buildings, and making sure temperatures can be easily measured.

In HSC settings, staff should know what they can do to reduce risks for patients and clients, including identifying those most vulnerable and carrying out **individual risk and need assessments**. Attention should be paid to medicines management, accommodation risks and ensuring care plans communicate, address, and monitor risks and impacts to patients and service users where appropriate. Flexible arrangements are invaluable, for example, increasing provision of cold drinking water, ensuring ready access to cooling fans and having options to change from hot to cold (and high water content) food menus.

Your plans should ensure that any potential hot weather disruption to business continuity is minimised. This includes **actions to protect staff**, for example options to change staff rotas and increase surge capacity, alternative ways of working or using equipment in different ways, as well as actions on medicine storage solutions, IT system resilience, etc.

Your plans should detail how you will **respond to hot weather episodes**. Roles and responsibilities should be defined, as should information flows (within organisations and to reach both commissioned services and unpaid home carers) and action triggers. Join-up, within and across agencies and networks, is critical.

Your **communication plans should be in place** before hot weather episodes. Staff, patients, clients and the public, including those giving and receiving unpaid home care, should all have their attention drawn to [the latest advice from Public Health Wales](#). This advice will support planning, communications and joint working before hot weather episodes occur.

At local and regional level, you should ensure that your plans align and complement other preparedness and resilience arrangements. It is advisable to **communicate and co-ordinate** this through Public Services Boards, Local Resilience Fora and other relevant partnership mechanisms. Regular multi-agency training and exercising can help test plans and ensure they are fit for purpose.

## ***Response to a heat episode***

When extreme or unusually hot weather is forecast by the Met Office, you should be ready to implement contingency arrangements and plans as appropriate. Staff should be made aware and key messages, advice and actions confirmed and a communications cascade actioned (within the organisations and beyond to any commissioned service providers and, where practicable, those giving and receiving unpaid home care).

When an episode of extreme or unusually hot weather is imminent (as confirmed by Met Office NSWWS amber or red warnings):

- HSC partners should activate contingency arrangements, including preparing for a surge in service demand, monitoring indoor temperatures and taking actions (as specified in plans) to keep buildings cool to minimise risks for patients and clients.

- HSC partners should notify staff, commissioned service providers and, where practicable, those giving and receiving unpaid home care, without delay.
- HSC partners should deliver patient/client services which take account of [the latest advice from Public Health Wales](#) (which includes specific advice for [healthcare professionals](#) and [social care managers](#)) and any pre-prepared needs-based individual care plans. This may include visiting or telephoning high-risk individuals and/or their carers, conveying advice and key messages, and offering information about what people should do if they feel unwell.
- Public Health Wales (PHW) is an HSC partner with more than one role. From a service delivery perspective, PHW should act on the advice above as appropriate. PHW will also issue general public health advice through traditional and social media channels. This may be tailored to different population groups (e.g., those coping without a water supply) and settings (those planning or attending mass outdoor gatherings such as concerts or festivals).
- HSC partners should monitor heat health risks and impacts on staff, patients and clients and share insights and intelligence on any service pressures.
- Risks and impacts for the HSC sector more broadly may go beyond heat health risks and impacts; for example, there could be increased potential for physical injuries and drowning (from spending more time outside and in water), burns (e.g., from barbecue use), alcohol-related illness, etc.

### ***Incident escalation and Civil Contingencies***

The scale of the response required will be determined by characteristics of the hot weather episode, notably temperature, duration, geographical area, population demographics, local risks, and impacts.

The response may be well managed within individual agencies, perhaps with informal updates to Welsh Government. But there will be a need to escalate arrangements, for example if an NSWWS amber or red-level warning is issued, or an emergency or major incident declared. In this case, multiple agencies and services may be affected, and services risk being challenged and potentially overwhelmed.

If an emergency is declared, relevant HSC partners will need to support regional Local Resilience Forum (LRF) emergency response structures and, if established, national emergency response mechanisms in line with the Pan Wales Response Plan. Health Boards, Trusts and Local Authorities will work with partners through established multi-agency command and control structures providing regular situation reports to the Welsh Government if required.

### **Reflect and learn**

Please review your risk assessment and associated plans regularly and undertake timely debriefs on incident responses. This can inform learning within and across agencies and the development of more effective future plans and actions to minimise heat health risks. You should ensure that your heat adaptation plans also reflect the latest evidence on the health impacts of climate change (see, for example, the latest from the [Climate Change Committee](#)).

Our advice will continue to be kept under review. If HSC system partners wish to give feedback and/or share experiences and learning, please email: [HSC.ClimateChangeAndEPH@gov.wales](mailto:HSC.ClimateChangeAndEPH@gov.wales)

Sadly, the effects of climate change are already being felt. Thank you for your efforts to ensure that our communities remain safe from the effects of hot weather.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Isabel Oliver". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'I'.

**PROFESSOR ISABEL OLIVER**

To: NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership to forward to:

All General Practitioners – please ensure this message is seen by all practice nurses and non-principals working in your practice and retain a copy in your 'locum information pack'.

All Community Pharmacists

Independent/Private clinics and Hospitals and Hospices throughout Wales

To: Health Boards and NHS Trusts:

Chief Executives

Medical Directors

Nurse Directors

Directors of Public Health

Directors of Planning

Climate Change and Sustainability Leads

Hospital Principals and Chief Pharmacists

To: Public Health Wales:

Chief Executive

Director of Public Health Services

To: Social Care System Partners

Chief Social Care Officer

LA Chief Execs