

June 2024

Who this advice is for

This advice is based on [UK Health Security Agency \(UKHSA\)](#) guidance for social care managers on how to reduce the risks of hot weather to the health and wellbeing of people they provide care for. Social care managers have an essential role in implementing this advice and sharing it with staff before and during hot weather.

UKHSA guidance has been adapted where necessary to ensure information provided is relevant for Wales. This advice should also be read alongside the Heat Health Risk: Advice Note for Wales Health and Social Care System Partners from Welsh Government.

It is important that managers also share [advice on hot weather](#) with staff providing care to social care clients (including in their own homes), for advice on keeping homes cool during periods of hot weather.

Other carers providing direct care to people, including in their own homes, should also review [advice on hot weather](#).

Main messages

Hot weather can cause people to become unwell through [dehydration](#), [heat exhaustion and heatstroke](#), and can increase the risk of heart attack, stroke, lung problems and other diseases.

In all settings, you can reduce the risks associated with hot weather for those you care for by:

- Ensuring all social care staff are familiar with this advice.
- Considering changes to the building that could reduce exposure to heat in the home or the care setting.
- Ensuring those in your service's care drink plenty of fluids throughout the day, that staff monitor people in their care for significant changes in hydration status compared to what is normal for them (for example, peeing less often, feeling dizzy or light-headed) and know what action to take if these changes occur.
- Planning activities for times of the day when it is cooler such as the morning or evening.
- Working with staff to keep those they care for out of the sun at the hottest time of the day, usually between 11am and 3pm.

If you work in a setting that provides care in clients' own homes, you should also:

- Ensure staff know who is at higher risk of heat related illnesses and how to reduce that risk.
- Have plans in place for individuals you are responsible for to keep them and their home cool.

About hot weather and health

Severe hot weather is dangerous to everyone. Hot weather can happen suddenly, and rapid rises in temperature affect people at higher risk very rapidly and can be fatal. Climate change means dangerous hot weather is becoming more common in the UK.

Deaths and morbidity from hot weather are preventable and requires careful preparation. Plans need to be in place **before** high temperatures are forecast.

Who is at risk?

While anyone can be affected by hot weather, some groups are at higher risk than others. People adapt to heat with physiological responses (like sweating) and behavioural changes (changing clothes). Individuals are at increased risk from heat when one or more of these mechanisms is limited, for example by illness (including physical and mental/cognitive health problems), frailty, or medication.

Consider what:

- The individual's risk factors are for being ill during hot weather.
- Can be changed to protect them.

An individual's risk is related to a combination of factors relating to their health, behaviours and environment.

Older people and those with underlying medical conditions are particularly vulnerable to the effects of hot weather. This means that people living in all kinds of care homes, those who are unable to care for themselves or those who require support in their daily activities are at higher risk of becoming unwell. High-risk groups include:

- Older people aged over 65 years.
- People with underlying health conditions, particularly heart problems, breathing problems, dementia, diabetes, kidney disease, Parkinson's disease or mobility problems.
- People on certain medications.
- People with serious mental health problem.
- People who are already ill and dehydrated (for example from diarrhoea and vomiting).
- People with alcohol or drug dependence.
- People experiencing homelessness, including rough sleepers and those who are unable to make adaptations to their living accommodation such as sofa surfers or those living in hostels.
- People who live alone and may be unable to care for themselves.

[Air pollution](#) combined with hot weather can also worsen symptoms for people with existing breathing problems or heart conditions.

How to recognise heat exhaustion and heat stroke and what to do about them

The main causes of illness and death during a heatwave are respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. However, specific heat-related illnesses such as heat exhaustion and heatstroke can affect most at-risk groups and the general population more widely.

Heat exhaustion

Heat exhaustion occurs when a person has lost too much water. Common symptoms of heat exhaustion include:

- tiredness
- weakness
- feeling faint
- headache
- muscle cramps
- feeling or being sick
- heavy sweating and intense thirst
- a core temperature between 38°C and 40°C.

What to do if someone has symptoms of heat exhaustion

Carers should take immediate action to cool a person with these symptoms down. Heat exhaustion does not usually need emergency medical attention if the person cools down within 30 minutes. If action is not taken to help the person to cool down, heat exhaustion can lead to heatstroke.

How to cool someone down if they have symptoms of heat exhaustion:

- Move to a cooler place such as a room with air conditioning or somewhere in the shade or cool the room down if it's not possible to move them.
- Remove all unnecessary clothing like a jacket or socks.
- Help them drink a rehydration drink or cool water.
- Apply cool water by spray or sponge to exposed skin. Cold packs wrapped in a cloth and put under the armpits or on the neck can also help.

If a person is cooling down and feeling better within 30 minutes, this suggests they are improving. However, if this does not happen, if you are concerned about symptoms, or they are worsening, seek medical advice by contacting NHS 111. In an emergency, or if you think someone has heatstroke, dial 999.

Further information on [heat exhaustion and heatstroke symptoms](#) can be found on the NHS website.

Heatstroke

Heatstroke happens when the body is no longer able to cool down and core temperature exceeds 40°C for more than 45 minutes. Common symptoms of heatstroke include:

- a very high temperature
- hot skin that is not sweating and might look red (this can be harder to see on brown and black skin)
- a fast heartbeat
- fast breathing or shortness of breath
- confusion and lack of coordination
- a seizure or fit
- loss of consciousness

Heatstroke is a medical emergency: if you suspect someone has heatstroke you should dial 999. While you wait for assistance, put them in the recovery position if they have lost consciousness, and continue efforts to cool them down (as above).

How to reduce the risks of hot weather

Many of the harms caused by heat exposure can be prevented by taking a few simple actions.

The effects of heat occur rapidly, and preparatory action should be considered throughout the year for your response to hot weather to be effective.

Preparing for hot weather

In preparation for hot weather, there are actions you can take depending on your role. In all settings, you should:

- Ensure all social care staff are familiar with this advice.
- Ensure staff have undertaken relevant training.
- Check fridges are working at correct temperatures and, for those where medicines are being stored, make sure they are set up, maintained and monitored.
- If your setting uses fans or air conditioning units, ensure that they are clean, working, serviced and [portable appliance tested](#).
- Listen to the news and check your local [weather forecast](#) so that you know when hot weather is expected.
- Look out for advice on what to do if services such as power, water supplies and transport are likely to be affected.
- Check [air pollution forecasts](#) and advice (pollution can worsen the effects of heat on those with breathing problems).
- When hot weather is expected, ensure staff plan any activities to avoid being outside during the hottest part of the day between 11am and 3pm.
- Ensure relevant staff know how to check and record room temperatures and follow internal procedures if a cause for concern is identified.
- Consider whether additional staffing or support will be required during periods of hot weather.
- Ensure that staff have a way of measuring room temperature where clients spend the most time.
- If you are concerned, speak to the relevant healthcare professional to see if changes to medications are needed during extreme heat, as some medications may put individuals at greater risk of hot weather.
- Consider adding relevant checks to your setting's work management system to remind staff to keep high-risk clients and areas cool.

In care homes and other residential settings, you should:

- Ensure staff know the steps to take to keep the home, themselves, and those they care for cool and hydrated during hot weather.

If you work in a setting that provides care in clients' own homes, you should ensure that staff and those paying for care (clients themselves, families, local authorities) know who is most at risk in hot weather, and are aware of what local and national support available to make improvements to homes and protect these individuals, this could include:

- Increasing outside shading, in the form of shutters, shaded areas, trees or leafy plants.
- Using reflective paint to help keep the building cool.
- Increasing outside greenery as it aids cooling by acting as a natural air conditioner.
- Adding well-designed insulation to the building, which can help to keep it warm in winter and cooler in the summer.

Responding to hot weather

Keep the home environment cool

Homes can overheat and become uncomfortable during warmer weather, particularly when people are trying to sleep.

High-risk groups that are vulnerable to the effects of heat can find it hard to cool themselves efficiently once temperatures rise above 26°C.

In all settings, ensure that staff:

- Regularly check weather forecasts, and check and record indoor and outdoor temperatures regularly during the hottest periods.
- Close windows when outdoor temperatures are higher than indoor temperatures (for example during the day).
- Close any external shutters or shades, blinds and curtains – this keeps cooler air in, and hotter air out.
- Close and shade windows very early in the morning so that the heat does not build up.
- Consider adding temporary internal or external shading to any windows that do not have blinds, shutters or curtains, especially if they face east, west or south.
- Open windows (if it is safe to) when the air is cooler outside than inside, for example at night – try to get air flowing through the building.
- Check that any heating is turned off, and turn off lights and electrical equipment that are not in use to reduce indoor temperatures.

In care homes and other residential settings:

- Ensure that there is a cool room or area (able to be maintained below 26°C) where people can go to cool down – cool areas can be developed with appropriate indoor and outdoor shading, ventilation, the use of indoor and outdoor plants and, if necessary, air conditioning.
- Ensure that staff know the main actions to take to cool down individuals who cannot be moved to cool areas, or for whom a move might be too disorienting (see below).

- Consider encouraging family members to visit in mornings and evenings to prevent extra heat during the afternoon from increased numbers of people being present.

If you work in a setting that provides care in clients' own homes, you should ensure that staff:

- Use a thermometer to measure the temperature and identify when a room is too hot (above 26°C).
- Check local plans and procedures for what to do if a cause for concern is identified.

Keep the people you care for cool

There are things you can do to prevent people from overheating when the weather is hot. In all settings you should ensure that staff:

- Monitor clients closely for any early signs of heat-related illness and initiate appropriate treatment when needed.
- Are aware of which service users are taking medications that may increase a person's risk of developing heat related illness, such as anticholinergics, vasoconstrictors, antihistamines, drugs that reduce renal function, diuretics, and antihypertensives.
- Use electric fans if the air temperature is below 35°C.
- Do not use fans if it is hotter than 35°C, as they can raise body temperatures.
- Do not aim fans directly at people's bodies as this can lead to dehydration.
- If using fans, be aware there is potential for these to spread germs, debris or dust around the setting – avoid blowing air from one person to another, and follow local and NHS advice on cleaning, servicing and decontamination.
- Monitor closely for any signs of dehydration – this is especially important for those who are less mobile.
- Be aware that plastic pads and mattresses can make someone warmer during hot weather and consider alternatives if feasible.
- Check that those you care for wear lightweight, loose-fitting, light-coloured clothes.
- If going outdoors, consider clothes such as long-sleeved shirts, trousers or long skirts in close-weave fabrics to absorb sweat and prevent skin irritation as well as protect them from the sun.
- Encourage people to remain in the coolest parts of the building as much as possible.
- Go outside if it is cooler outside in the shade or consider moving people to a cooler part of the building, especially for sleeping, if possible.

In care homes and other residential settings, you should ensure that staff:

- Monitor body temperature, pulse rate, blood pressure and hydration (consider regular body weight measurement to assess water loss – see information above on heat exhaustion and heat stroke).
- For those who can't be moved, or for whom a move might be too disorienting, take actions to cool them down (for example liquids, cool wipes) and be vigilant for signs of dehydration or heat-related illnesses.

- Check that you have an adequate supply of fans and sponges (or similar), and that these are maintained in line with NHS advice on cleaning, servicing and decontamination.
- Regularly put cool water on exposed parts of the body, for example with a damp sponge or cloth on the back of the neck to help with temperature regulation.
- Arrange cool showers or baths, if possible.

Prevent dehydration

Enable staff to prevent dehydration by checking that service users drink enough fluids throughout the day, supporting those who are unable to drink unaided, and encouraging them to drink overnight. They should drink enough so that their urine is a pale straw colour.

Ensure that water and ice are widely available, and that there is a good choice of suitable drinks available for staff to share with service users. Water and diluted squash or lower fat milks are good choices. Limit fruit juice, smoothies, and soft drinks, which can be high in sugar and dehydrate the body. Instead swap for diet and sugar-free varieties or squash.

Lollies and water-rich foods may be alternatives for individuals who do not drink much fluid.

Alcohol has a dehydrating effect on the body, so it is a good idea to choose alcohol-free options, or alternate alcoholic drinks with a glass of water.

If those you care for are going out, take a refillable bottle filled with water.

Plan to adapt menus to cold meals (preferably with a high-water content, such as fruit and salads) in consultation with those you care for.

If those you care for are fasting during hot weather, ensure your staff understand what is expected and support them to take medical and pastoral advice before fasting.

More information on the [signs and symptoms of dehydration](#) is available from the NHS.

Protect those you care for from the sun

The sun is often strong enough in the UK to cause sunburn. In addition to ensuring staff are aware of heat exhaustion and heat stroke advice, support staff in providing the following advice and support to service users:

- Stay inside or in the shade between 11am and 3pm when the sun is strongest.
- If going outside, wear lightweight, loose-fitting, light-coloured clothes, such as a long-sleeved shirt, trousers, or long skirts in close-weave fabrics
- Wear a wide-brimmed hat to protect the face, eyes, head, ears and neck.
- Wear sunglasses which are wraparound or with wide arms to provide protection from the sun.

- Apply sunscreen generously and reapply frequently, especially after activities that remove it, such as swimming or towelling – the NHS recommends that this should be with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30, and 4- or 5-star UVA protection.

More information on [sunscreen and sun safety](#), including how to apply sunscreen, is available from the NHS.

Avoid strenuous exercise and activities

If possible, help service users avoid activities or exercise during the hottest part of the day, between 11am and 3pm. If they do want or need to carry out any physical activities, such as exercise or gardening, plan to do these during the morning or evening when it is cooler. Also consider limiting staff exertion during the hottest hours where possible.

Avoid hot closed spaces

Small, closed spaces such as stationary cars can get dangerously hot very quickly. Make sure that those you care for are not left alone in stationary cars or other closed spaces.

Storage of medications

Most medicines should be kept below 25°C, so they should be stored somewhere cool, dry, out of direct sunlight and away from windowsills. Medicines should only be stored in the fridge if specified. Consider whether clinical input is needed for changes to treatment or medications. For further guidance on medicines storage, speak to an NHS pharmacy service.

Staff health and wellbeing

Staff can also be at risk during high temperatures. Encourage and enable staff to carry water and stay hydrated. Ensure staff are aware of the high-risk factors that might affect them, and to report concerns about their own health promptly.

Consult the Health and Safety Executive for advice on [wearing personal protective equipment \(PPE\) in high temperatures](#), and for advice on [managing high temperatures in the workplace](#) more generally.