



Public Health
England

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Heatwave Plan for England 2013

Looking after yourself and others during hot weather –
The latest advice

May 2013

Heat can be harmful to your health – key messages

1. In one hot spell in August 2003 in England, deaths in those aged 75 and over rose by 60%, with approximately 2000 total extra deaths than would normally be expected.
2. Those with heart, respiratory and serious health problems are more at risk and the heat can make these conditions worse. Babies and young children are also especially at risk.
3. Many prescription medicines can reduce your tolerance of heat. You should keep taking your medicines, but take extra care to keep cool.
4. Danger symptoms to watch out for in hot weather include: feeling faint and dizzy, short of breath, vomiting or increasing confusion.
5. Take immediate action if danger symptoms of heatstroke are present:
 - Cool down as quickly as possible (see the advice on the pages which follow).
 - Do not take aspirin or paracetamol – this can make you worse. Please note: do carry on taking all other prescribed medicines.
 - Seek further advice from NHS 111, a doctor, or ring 999 if the person has collapsed.

What should you do?

Mostly, it's a matter of common sense. Listen to your local weather forecast so you know if a heatwave is on the way. Plan ahead to reduce the risk of ill health from the heat.

Who is most at risk?

The heat can affect anyone, but some people run a greater risk of serious harm. These include:

- Older people, especially those over 75.
- Babies and young children.
- People with serious mental health problems.
- People on certain medication.
- People with a serious chronic condition, particularly breathing or heart problems.
- People who already have a high temperature from an infection.
- People who misuse alcohol or take illicit drugs.
- People with mobility problems.
- People who are physically active, like manual workers and athletes.

Top tips for keeping cool

It is best for your health to avoid getting too hot in the first place. Remember to think of those who may be more at risk from the effects of heat. Below are some tips to keep yourself and others cool and what to do if someone feels unwell:

Stay out of the heat:

- Keep out of the sun between 11.00am and 3.00pm.
- If you have to go out in the heat, walk in the shade, apply sunscreen and wear a hat and light scarf.
- Avoid extreme physical exertion. If you can't avoid strenuous outdoor activity, like sport, DIY or gardening, keep it for cooler parts of the day, like early morning or evening.
- Wear light, loose-fitting cotton clothes.

Cool yourself down:

- Have plenty of cold drinks, and avoid excess alcohol, caffeine and hot drinks.
- Eat cold foods, particularly salads and fruit with a high water content.
- Take a cool shower, bath or body wash.
- Sprinkle water over the skin or clothing, or keep a damp cloth on the back of your neck.

Keep your environment cool:

- Keeping your living space cool is especially important for infants, the elderly or those with chronic health conditions or those who can't look after themselves.
- Keep windows that are exposed to the sun closed during the day, and open windows at night when the temperature has dropped.
- Close curtains that receive morning or afternoon sun. However, care should be taken with metal blinds and dark curtains, as these can absorb heat – consider replacing or putting reflective material in-between them and the window space.
- Place a thermometer in your main living room and bedroom to keep a check on the temperature.
- Turn off non-essential lights and electrical equipment – they generate heat.
- Keep indoor plants and bowls of water in the house as evaporation helps cool the air.
- If possible, move into a cooler room, especially for sleeping.

- Electric fans may provide some relief, if temperatures are below 35°C. At temperatures above 35°C fans may not prevent heat related illness and may cause dehydration. The advice is not to aim the fan directly on the body and to have regular drinks. This is especially important in the case of sick people confined to bed.

If you, or somebody you know, find your home to be uncomfortably hot and you have concerns about it affecting yours or someone else's health, seek medical advice about the person, and seek advice from the environmental health department within your local authority about the home.

In the Longer term:

Consider putting up external shading outside windows.

- Use pale, reflective external paints.
- Have your loft and cavity walls insulated – this keeps the heat in when it is cold and out when it is hot.
- Grow trees and leafy plants near windows to act as natural air-conditioners.

Look out for others:

- Keep an eye on isolated, elderly, ill or very young people and make sure they are able to keep cool.
- Ensure that babies, children or elderly people are not left alone in stationary cars.
- Check on elderly or sick neighbours, family or friends every day during a heatwave.
- Be alert and call a doctor or social services if someone is unwell or further help is needed.

If you have a health problem:

- Keep medicines below 25°C or in the refrigerator (read the storage instructions on the packaging).
- Seek medical advice if you are suffering from a chronic medical condition or taking multiple medications.

If you or others feel unwell:

- Try to get help if you feel dizzy, weak, anxious or have intense thirst and headache; move to a cool place as soon as possible and measure your body temperature.
- Drink some water or fruit juice to rehydrate.
- Rest immediately in a cool place if you have painful muscular cramps (particularly in the legs, arms or abdomen, in many cases after sustained exercise during very hot weather), and drink oral rehydration solutions containing electrolytes.
- Medical attention is needed if heat cramps last more than one hour.
- Consult your doctor if you feel unusual symptoms or if symptoms persist.

Seek advice if you have any concerns:

- Contact your doctor, a pharmacist or NHS 111 if you are worried about your health during a heatwave, especially if you are taking medication, if you feel unwell or have any unusual symptoms.
- Watch for cramp in your arms, legs or stomach, feelings of mild confusion, weakness or problems sleeping.
- If you have these symptoms, rest for several hours, keep cool and drink water or fruit juice. Seek medical advice if they get worse or don't go away.

If you suspect someone has heatstroke:

Remember, heatstroke can kill. It can develop very suddenly, and rapidly lead to unconsciousness. If you suspect someone has heatstroke, call 999 immediately.

While waiting for the ambulance

- If possible, move the person somewhere cooler.
- Increase ventilation by opening windows or using a fan.
- Cool them down as quickly as possible by loosening their clothes, sprinkling them with cold water or wrapping them in a damp sheet.
- If they are conscious, give them water or fruit juice to drink.
- Do **not** give them aspirin or paracetamol.

Further information

- Check the weather forecast and any high temperature health warnings at:
www.metoffice.gov.uk
- For further information about how to protect your health during a heatwave visit NHS Choices at: **NHS Choices** at www.nhs.uk/summerhealth
- Advice on ways to minimise ultraviolet ray induced skin and eye damage can be found in the Public Health England sunsense guide found in the Health Protection Agency/Public Health England sunsense guide http://www.hpa.org.uk/Topics/Radiation/UnderstandingRadiation/InformationSheets/info_SunsensePoster/
- Heatwaves may worsen air pollution. If you would like more information about air pollution in the UK or health advice to those who may be particularly sensitive to air pollution there is an automated freephone recorded information service run by Defra on **0800 55 66 77**, or Defra website (<http://uk-air.defra.gov.uk/>).

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