

Coping with a Heatwave

When you hear warnings about severe weather people naturally think about storms, flooding and snow but severe heat can be just as great a concern. With global warming longer hotter periods could become a regular feature of our weather. Emergency plans for coping with a heatwave are lead by the NHS.

What classes as a Heatwave?

A heatwave is defined as periods of hot weather where temperatures reach 30 °C plus during the day and 15 °C at night

What are the risks?

In a severe heatwave you may get dehydrated and your body may overheat, leading to heat exhaustion.

Symptoms of heat exhaustion can include headaches, dizziness, nausea and vomiting, muscle weakness or cramps, pale skin, and a high temperature.

If left untreated heat exhaustion can easily become heatstroke. Symptoms can include headaches, nausea, an intense thirst, sleepiness, hot, red and dry skin, a sudden rise in temperature, confusion, aggression, convulsions and loss of consciousness. Heatstroke can result in irreversible damage to your body, including the brain, or death.

Who is at risk?

Those who run a greater risk of harm include:

- Older People
- Babies and young children
- People with mental health problems
- People on certain medication
- People with serious chronic conditions, particularly breathing or heart problems
- People who already have a high temperature from an infection
- People who use alcohol or illicit drugs
- People with mobility problems

What should you do?

Mostly it's a matter of common sense:

- Listen to the weather forecast and keep out of the sun during the hottest part of the day
- If you must go out, stay in the shade. Wear a hat and light, loose-fitting clothes, avoid strenuous outdoor activity, like sport, DIY, or gardening
- Drink plenty of water.
- Use open windows and curtains to regulate the temperature of your home.

- Stay cool by splashing yourself with cold water or take cooler showers or baths.
- Eat more cold food, especially those which contain water such as salads and fruit

Travelling in a heatwave

A prolonged heatwave can mean people do not sleep as well and are therefore more likely to be tired and this may make them less considerate to other drivers or even affect their driving skills.

Try and keep cool when driving by opening the windows or using the air conditioning. Having a well ventilated vehicle will avoid drowsiness. Take plenty of water with you and have regular rest breaks if travelling long distances.

Carrying a bottle of water in the vehicle is important just in case you get caught up in a major traffic jam and face a long delay. You could be stuck for hours so just drink when necessary.

More information:

For further information on looking after yourself and others during a prolonged period of hot weather see the NHS Heatwave guide.

(<http://www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/13/53/04/04135304.pdf>)

For information and specific advice for care home managers and staff supporting vulnerable people before and during a heatwave see the NHS guide.

(<http://www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/13/52/99/04135299.pdf>)

For the plan for England - protecting health and reducing harm from extreme heat and heatwaves see

(<http://www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/13/52/97/04135297.pdf>)

Or visit the Met Office site for advice on dealing with heat and the sun.

<http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/europe/uk/advice/heat.html>