



UK Health
Security
Agency

Hot weather communications toolkit

Supporting document for the Adverse Weather and Health Plan

Version: June 2023

Background

Climate change is already causing warmer temperatures in the UK. All of the warmest years on record in the UK have occurred since 2002, and in July 2022 temperatures exceeded 40°C for the first time on record. It is estimated that 2,803 people aged 65 years and over died due to the heat in England in 2022, and it is predicted that the number of heat-related deaths per year may triple by 2050.

Hot weather can increase the risk of heart attack, stroke, lung problems and other diseases. Older people, babies and young children are more likely to be unwell from hot weather because their bodies are less able to regulate temperature. People with underlying medical conditions can also be vulnerable to the effects of hot weather.

Many of the harms linked to heat exposure are preventable if a few simple actions are taken.

During the summer, UKHSA will work with the Met Office to issue alerts alongside the weather forecast if the weather is so hot that it has the potential to affect people's health.

People at risk of becoming unwell in hot weather

Anyone can become unwell when the weather is hot. People who are at higher risk of becoming seriously unwell include:

- older people aged 65 years and over (note change from previous guidance of 75 years of age and above)
- babies and young children aged 5 years and under
- 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 problems
- people who are already ill and dehydrated (for example from diarrhoea and vomiting)
- people who experience alcohol or drug dependence
- people who are physically active and spend a lot of time outside such as runners, cyclists and walkers
- people who work in jobs that require manual labour or extensive time outside
- people experiencing homelessness, including rough sleepers and those who are unable to make adaptations to their living accommodation such as sofa surfers or living in hostels.
- people who live alone and may be unable to care for themselves

About this toolkit

This toolkit supports UKHSA's Adverse Weather and Health Plan and the updated Heat-Health Alerting (HHA) service.

It is one of a series of adverse weather communications toolkits which will be shared with stakeholders, with other versions covering **cold weather** and **flooding**.

The communication material in this toolkit relates specifically to hot weather and is intended to provide basic health information that can be communicated **during hot spells** so that the right messages reach the right people at the right time.

There may be reputational risks from communicating advice seen as too precautionary when many may just want to enjoy some sunshine.

It is not an easy message to get across, but it is important due to the significant impacts on health that occur during hot spells.

The content included in this toolkit can be used to target both public and professional audiences.

About the Adverse Weather and Health Plan

The Adverse Weather and Health Plan published in April 2023 delivers UKHSA's commitment under the National Adaptation Programme to develop a single plan, bringing together and improving current guidance on weather and health.

It builds on existing measures taken by government, its agencies, NHS England and local authorities, to protect individuals and communities from the health effects of adverse weather and to build community resilience.

The Plan outlines the important areas where the public sector, independent sector, voluntary sector, health and social care organisations and local communities can work together to maintain and improve integrated arrangements for planning and response to deliver the best outcomes possible during adverse weather.

The Plan is underpinned by:

- an evidence collection, published in parallel, that underlines the activities and scientific evidence that support the Plan
- guidance and support materials
- the Weather-Health alerts (heat and cold), developed in collaboration with the Met Office

About the UKHSA Heat Health Alerting Service (HHA)

Underpinning the Adverse Weather and Health Plan (AWHP) is the UKHSA Heat-Health Alerting (HHA) service.

The primary aim of the HHA is to raise awareness of periods of high temperatures which could impact the health of the population, to the NHS, local authorities, social care, and other public agencies; professionals working with people at risk; local communities and voluntary groups; and for the general public.

The HHA is operational year-round. However, the **core alerting season is between 1 June to 30 September**. Within this core alerting period a Heat-Health Planner will also be issued every Monday and Friday to provide Heat-Health horizon scanning for the next 5 days, 6 to 15 days, and 16 to 30 days ahead.

During the warm season, UKHSA and the Met Office will monitor the weather forecasts and where episodes of hot weather are identified using predefined evidence-based considerations, a joint dynamic risk assessment will be carried out and the appropriate alert issued.

UKHSA Heat Health Alerting Service ctd...

Commencing from 1 June 2023, HHAs and Heat-Health Planners will be issued by UKHSA in collaboration with the Met Office. Individuals and organisations that wish to receive the impact based HHA must [re-register to receive the alerts](#) where users will be able to specify which regions they wish to receive alerts for.

In addition, the HHA will move from the previous system based on probabilities of reaching threshold temperatures to impact-based alerts. The new impact-based HHAs will contain:

- headline weather conditions expected in the coming days
- an outline of what impacts might be expected
- brief overview of regional impact assessment
- links to additional information, advice and guidance

A [new dedicated web-platform](#) has been developed in which the current alert status over the 5-days ahead will be publicly available.

As was the case with the previous HHA, it is anticipated that organisations will initiate cascade of alerts within their organisations and to partner organisations as appropriate and as agreed locally.

UKHSA Heat Health Alerting Service ctd

In line with other weather warning systems in operation within England (and the UK), warnings will be issued when the weather conditions have the potential to impact the health and wellbeing of the population. The alerts will be given a colour (yellow, amber or red) based on the combination of the **impact** the weather conditions could have, and the **likelihood** of those impacts being realised. These assessments are made in conjunction with the Met Office when adverse weather conditions are indicated within the forecast.

The platform aims to cover the spectrum of action from different groups. In general terms:

- **Green (preparedness):** No alert will be issued as the conditions are likely to have minimal impact and health; business as usual and summer/winter planning and preparedness activities.
- **Yellow (response):** These alerts cover a range of situations. Yellow alerts may be issued during periods of heat/cold which would be unlikely to impact most people but could impact those who are particularly vulnerable.
- **Amber (enhanced response):** An amber alert indicates that weather impacts are likely to be felt across the whole health service, with potential for the whole population to be at risk. Non-health sectors may also start to observe impacts and a more significant coordinated response may be required.
- **Red (emergency response):** A red alert indicates significant risk to life for even the healthy population

Access a full user guide on the weather health alerting system can be found here: [Adverse Weather and Health Plan - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

National Severe Weather Warning Service

In England there are two early warning systems related to high temperature; UKHSA's HHAs, and the Extreme Heat (EH) warnings as part of the Met Office's National Severe Weather Warning Service (NSWWS). Since summer 2021 UKHSA and the Met Office have collaborated to ensure that the HHA and EH warnings are aligned and work together to communicate the expected impacts so that users act to minimise the potential impact. Each system has a slightly different target audience yet work together to help focus the messages being transmitted.

The HHA primarily targets the health and social care sector and responder community, while the NSWWS has a wider audience that includes the responder community, but also the general public. Due to the fact that the health sector is likely to observe impacts before other sectors, the HHA will issue yellow to red alerts, whereas NSWWS will only issue amber and red alerts for EH.

To ensure both systems are aligned, UKHSA and the Met Office will work together to undertake a combined risk assessment to determine the expected impacts and the likelihood of those impacts occurring. This partnership will ensure consistency across the systems, and a single overall message to users.

It should be noted that the HHA system and NSWWS EH system are both separate to the Met Office Heatwave Definition. The difference between these is clearly explained here:

<https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/learn-about/weather/types-of-weather/temperature/heatwave>

The heat-health alert system was designed to be for professionals rather than public-facing and thus the impact-based alerts (colour of the alerts) are not typically used in public facing communications. However, some media continue to use them to explain the severity of an event and may continue to do so.

Key public health messages on heat

The updated [Beat the heat: staying safe in hot weather guidance](#) outlines the key public health messages on heat which can be used as a basis for developing press statements or social media activity when a heat-health alert has been issued.

The main sections cover:

- Actions you can take to stay safe in hot weather
- About hot weather and health
- People at higher risk of becoming unwell in hot weather
- How to cool down
- How to be prepared for hot weather
- Staying well when there is hot weather
- Staying safe when swimming

Useful quotes for spells of hot weather

Hot weather not within alert criteria

In periods of hot weather which have not reached alert criteria, the media may still declare such periods 'heatwaves' and request statements on health risks.

In spells like this it's worth directing people to advice sources such as Beat the Heat or NHS web pages and caveating that for most there will be minimal health risk. It may also be worth including the following comment as the basis for advice:

Hot weather is something many people look forward to but it's worth remembering that warm spells can pose health risks for some people. It's important to protect yourself and others from too much sun or heat, to carry water when travelling and to think of those, such as young children or older people, who may not cope as well in the heat.

Useful quotes for spells of hot weather

When an alert is issued

If an alert is issued, UKHSA will use messages such as those below. In these circumstances the groups most at risk are those identified on slide 3. It's always worth remembering that those at risk may not recognise their own vulnerability to high temperatures so we also target messages at people who may have friends, neighbours or family members that could be more vulnerable.

Much of the advice on beating the heat is common sense. Before hot weather arrives, it is a good time to think about what you can do to protect yourself and your family and friends from heat. If spending time outdoors remember to take water or other hydrating drinks with you and protect yourself from the sun during the hottest hours of the day, usually between 11am and 3pm.

For some people, especially older people and those with underlying health conditions, the summer heat can bring real health risks. Temperatures indoors can be higher than temperatures outdoors. That's why we're urging everyone to keep an eye on people you know who may be at risk this summer. Ask if your friends, family or neighbours need any help keeping cool.

Example UKHSA news stories

When an alert is issued by UKHSA we will publish a news story, which is updated in line with any changes to the alert. On some occasions, dependent on circumstance, we may reference the alert/colour in the news story, but the main aim is to communicate the potential impact of the alert. More information on the potential impacts of the alert can be found in [the user guide](#). Below is an example of what a news story would look like for a yellow alert:

Yellow alert

The UK Health Security Agency have today issued a heat-health alert for the South West, West Midlands and Yorkshire and Humber regions.

The alert is currently in place from Monday 17 June to Friday 21 June, and if current forecasted temperatures are reached it is likely that there will be minor impacts across the health and social care sector.

These impacts include the increased use of health care services by vulnerable populations and an increase in risk to health for individuals over the age of 65 or with pre-existing health conditions, including respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. There is also the potential for overheating indoors, particularly in care settings.

Example news stories

When an alert is issued by UKHSA we publish a news story, which is updated in line with any changes to the alert. On some occasions, dependent on circumstance, we may reference the alert/colour in the news story, but the main aim is to communicate the potential impact of the alert. More information on the potential impacts of the alert can be found in [the user guide](#). Below is an example of what a news story would look like for an amber alert:

Amber alert

The UK Health Security Agency today issued a heat-health alert for the South West, West Midlands and Yorkshire and Humber regions.

The alert is currently in place from Monday 17 June to Friday 21 June, and if current forecasted temperatures are reached it is likely that there will be significant impacts across the health and social care sector.

These impacts include an increase in severe impact to health across the population, particularly in those aged over 65 or those with pre-existing health conditions, including respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, an increasing demand for remote health care services and an impact on the ability of services delivered due to heat effects on the work force.

Broadcast interview top lines

Organisations concerned with protecting health are often asked to carry out broadcast media interviews during periods of hot weather.

If your organisation is carrying out TV or radio interviews, we recommend the following top messages:

- **Keep a close eye on older people, young children, and people with long term health conditions – their bodies can struggle to cope with the heat and they are at greater risk.**
- **Keep cool indoors. Close curtains on windows that face the sun, open windows when its cooler outside than in (when it is safe to do so) and turn off any unnecessary electrical items. Remember it is sometimes cooler sitting in a park under a tree than it is in a home that is too hot.**
- **Check weather forecasts and if you're spending time outdoors remember to travel with bottled water, apply sunscreen frequently and protect yourself from the sun during the hottest hours of the day, between 11am and 3pm.**

Social media/online content

During the course of the summer, UKHSA and partner agencies will issue social media updates about heat health as and when relevant and the frequency and nature of messages will be linked to the level of the alerts.

We recommend that NHS organisations, local authorities, community and voluntary sector organisations share UKHSA posts or issue your own social media updates.

This section of the toolkit includes a range of messages that you may wish to use or adapt across your own channels.

You can download social media assets [HERE](#)

Template website/newsletter article

Staying safe during the heat

At this time of year most of us look forward to some warm, sunny weather and the chance to spend time outdoors, but it's important to remember that some people struggle to cope in the heat.

The good news is, we can all take precautions that allow us to enjoy the hot weather safely and help people who might be more vulnerable as the temperatures rise.

Who is vulnerable?

Anyone can become unwell when the weather is hot. People who are at higher risk of becoming seriously unwell include:

- older people aged 65 years and over
- babies and young children aged 5 years and under
- 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 problems
- people who are already ill and dehydrated (for example from diarrhoea and vomiting)
- people who experience alcohol or drug dependence
- people who are physically active and spend a lot of time outside such as runners, cyclists and walkers
- people who work in jobs that require manual labour or extensive time outside
- people experiencing homelessness, including rough sleepers and those who are unable to make adaptations to their living accommodation such as sofa surfers or living in hostels.
- people who live alone and may be unable to care for themselves

What can we do to stay safe?

There are a few very simple things we can all do stay safe when we experience high temperatures.

17 Hot Weather communications toolkit
This includes looking out for people who may struggle to keep themselves cool and hydrated. Get in touch with friends, family or neighbours that may need help keeping cool.

Suggested social media

Suggested messages to use in social media posts:

Vulnerable people

- **Look out for older people, people with long-term health conditions and young children who may find it more difficult to stay cool and hydrated in hot weather**
- **Check in on older friends, family and neighbours, particularly those who live alone, who may struggle to keep themselves cool and hydrated during the hot weather**
- **Don't leave babies, children, older people or vulnerable people or pets alone in stationary cars in hot weather**
- **Look out for children in prams or pushchairs in hot weather; keep them in the shade, remove excess clothing, ensure there is adequate air flow and check regularly to ensure they are not overheated**

Suggested social media

Suggested messages for social media posts:

Keeping yourself cool

- **The best thing to do in the hot weather is stay out of the direct sun, especially during the hottest part of the day, between 11am and 3pm, as UV rays are strongest during these hours**
- **If you're going out in the hot weather, walk in the shade, apply sunscreen, wear a hat, sunglasses and light, loose-fitting, light-coloured clothes**
- **Apply sunscreen frequently of at least SPF 30 and 4 or 5 star ultraviolet A (UVA) protection regularly to exposed skin**
- **Drink plenty of fluids and avoid excess alcohol during the hot weather**
- **Avoid extreme physical exertion during the hot weather. If you can't avoid strenuous outdoor activity, keep it for cooler parts of the day such as early morning or evening**

Suggested social media

Suggested messages for social media posts:

How to cool down (if you or someone else has heat exhaustion)

- **Move to a cooler place such as a room with air conditioning or somewhere in the shade**
- **Remove all unnecessary clothing like a jacket or socks**
- **Drink cool water, a sports or rehydration drink, or eat cold and water rich foods like ice-lollies**
- **Apply cool water by spray or sponge to exposed skin, and using cold packs wrapped in a cloth and put under the armpits or on the neck can also help**

Heat symptoms

- **If you or others feel unwell, get dizzy, feel weak, anxious or have intense thirst, move to a cool place, rehydrate and cool your body down**
- **Rest immediately in a cool place if you have painful muscular spasms and drink plenty of cool drinks. Seek medical attention if you feel unusual symptoms or if symptoms persist**

Suggested social media

Suggested messages for social media posts:

Keeping your home cool

- **Close blinds and curtains on windows that are exposed to direct sunlight, move to the coolest part of your home and open windows (if it is safe to) when the air feels cooler outside than inside**
- **A cool living space is especially important for infants, older people or those with long-term health conditions**
- **Use electric fans if the temperature is below 35°C, but do not aim the fan directly at the body**
- **Go outside if it is cooler in the shade**

Suggested hashtags

We use a number of hashtags on social media. The ones we use most often are #WeatherAware, #WeatherReady and #BeattheHeat. The other hashtags should be used when we/the Met Office have declared a heatwave.

Hashtags

- **#WeatherAware** – used around our warnings including warnings advice
- **#WeatherReady** – Year-round use alongside any preparedness messaging
- **#BeattheHeat** – used by UKHSA around heat health alerts
- **#UKHeatwave** – before, during and after a UK heatwave
- **#Heatwave** – when talking about our own definition

Examples of social media assets available to download

UK Health Security Agency **HOT WEATHER**

Stay well in the heat

- 1 Drink plenty of fluids
- 2 Dress appropriately, stay in the shade
- 3 Limit strenuous activity

UK Health Security Agency **HOT WEATHER**

Keep your home cool during hot weather

Close blinds and curtains on windows that are exposed to direct sunlight, move to the coolest part of your home and open windows (if it is safe to) when the air feels cooler outside than inside.

UK Health Security Agency **HOT WEATHER**

The direct and indirect effects of hot weather

Increasing temperatures in excess of 25°C are associated with severe illness and excess heat-related deaths in vulnerable people. **Higher temperatures** can affect your health in different ways.

<p>Direct effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dehydration • heat cramps • heat rash • dizziness and fainting • heat exhaustion 	<p>Indirect effects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased demand on healthcare services • Power outages, affecting homes and healthcare services • Wildfires, and by association smoke inhalation
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UK Health Security Agency **HOT WEATHER**

Look out for people who might struggle to keep cool

If you have vulnerable family, friends and neighbours make sure they are aware of how they can keep themselves cool.

UK Health Security Agency **HOT WEATHER**

Going out in the sun?

Stay well in hot weather by drinking plenty of fluids, staying in the shade when the sun is strongest (11am-3pm) and limiting strenuous physical activity during the hottest part of the day.

Links and resources

Adverse Weather and Health Plan

The [Adverse Weather and Health Plan webpage](#) contains:

- Adverse Weather and Health Plan
- Adverse Weather and Health Plan: supporting evidence
- [Weather Health Alerting System: user guide](#) and [sign up](#)

Hot weather and health: guidance and advice

The [Hot weather and health: guidance and advice webpage](#) contains:

Guidance

- **Hot weather and health: supporting vulnerable people:** This information aims to assist professionals in protecting vulnerable people from the health impacts of severe heat in England.
 - [Supporting vulnerable people before and during hot weather: social care managers, staff, and carers](#)
 - [Supporting vulnerable people before and during hot weather: healthcare professionals](#)
 - [Looking after children and those in early years settings during heatwaves: for teachers and professionals](#)
 - [Supporting vulnerable people before and during hot weather: people homeless and sleeping rough](#)
- **Hot weather and health: events and mass gatherings**
 - [Hot weather advice: planning events and mass gatherings](#)

Hot weather resources

- **Beat the heat: hot weather advice:** Information on how to stay safe in hot weather, including how to keep your home cool.
 - [Beat the heat: staying safe in hot weather](#)
 - [Beat the heat: keep cool at home checklist](#)
 - [Beat the heat: poster](#)
- **Hot weather and health: action cards:** Heat-Health Alert (HHA) action cards summarise suggested actions to be taken by different professional bodies and organisations in the event of extreme heat.
 - [Heat-Health Alert action card for the voluntary and community sector](#)
 - [Heat-Health Alert action card for commissioners](#)
 - [Heat-Health Alert action card for providers](#)
 - [Heat-Health Alert action card for national government](#)

Other resources

- [UV Index Graphs - Defra, UK](#)
- [NHS page on heatwave: Be Prepared](#)
- [Met Office: Find a forecast](#)
- [Met Office National Severe Weather Warning Service](#)
- [Met Office Severe Weather](#)
- [Met Office Weather Ready](#)
- [Swim Healthy](#)



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Thank you

If you have any comments or questions about this toolkit, please reach out to us
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