



## **White Paper**

# Hot weather warning, what should we be doing?

July 2022





## Hot weather warning – What should we be doing?

The 25th July 2019 saw, to date, the highest temperature ever recorded in the UK, with the Botanic Gardens in Cambridge reaching 38.7°C. If the current weather patterns and reports are anything to go by, this record could be exceeded in the coming days.

While most of us enjoy a sunny day, in extreme conditions high temperatures can have a serious and adverse effect on our health, both in and out of work. So this month we are looking at how such a situation could impact us.



## 1. What can we expect over the next few days

The Met Office have issued an “Amber warning” for “extreme heat” indicating “Exceptionally high temperatures are possible during Sunday and Monday and could lead to widespread impacts on people and infrastructure.” This covering an area from Newcastle in the North to the South coast and from the South West to East Anglia.

A number of news outlets have also highlighted some of the predictive temperature modelling indicating temperature of over 40°C a possibility. Such temperatures could do more than break records, if we are not careful.

The Met Office also highlight:

- “Population-wide adverse health effects are likely to be experienced, not limited to those most vulnerable to extreme heat, leading to potential serious illness or danger to life. Government advice is that 999 services should be used in emergencies only; seek advice from 111 if you need non-emergency health advice;
- Substantial changes in working practices and daily routines likely to be required;
- Delays on roads and road closures are possible, along with delays and cancellations to rail and air travel, with potential for significant welfare issues for those who experience even moderate delays.”

Information from the Met Office can be found at - <https://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/warnings-and-advice/uk-warning>

So as well as the obvious health issues, this very warm weather could see problems with our transport infrastructure too.

Published in May 2022, the Government has produced a “Heatwave plan for England Protecting health and reducing harm from severe heat and heatwaves”.

The document and plan “describes actions to be taken before and during periods of severe heat in England. It details what preparations both individuals and organisations can make to reduce health risks and includes specific measures to protect vulnerable groups.”

In England between the 1st June and 15th September each year a heat-health alert system will operate and this is based on 5 main levels (Levels 0 to 4), these being:

- **Level 0 Year-round planning** - All year
- **Level 1 Heatwave and summer preparedness and action programme** - 1 June to 15 September
- **Level 2 Heatwave is forecast – Alert and readiness** - 60% or greater risk of heatwave in the next 2 to 3 days
- **Level 3 Heatwave action** - Temperature reached in one or more Met Office National Severe Weather Warning Service regions
- **Level 4 Major incident – Emergency response** - Central Government will declare a Level 4 alert in the event of severe or prolonged heatwave affecting sectors other than health.

The plan can be found at - [Heatwave Plan for England - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/111111/Heatwave-Plan-for-England.pdf)

Wales also have a published plan ([Health in Wales | Document | Heatwave Plan for Wales](#)), Scotland does not and we could find no published information for Northern Ireland.



## 2. What does the law say about workplace temperature?

Regulation 7 of the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992, covers workplace temperatures and states:

- “(1) During working hours, the temperature in all workplaces inside buildings shall be reasonable.
- (1A) Without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (1)
  - (a) a workplace shall be adequately thermally insulated where it is necessary, having regard to the type of work carried out and the physical activity of the persons carrying out the work; and
  - (b) excessive effects of sunlight on temperature shall be avoided.\*
- (2) A method of heating or cooling shall not be used which results in the escape into a workplace of fumes, gas or vapour of such character and to such extent that they are likely to be injurious or offensive to any person.
- (3) A sufficient number of thermometers shall be provided to enable persons at work to determine the temperature in any workplace inside a building.”

\*Added by the Health and Safety (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2002 (SI 2002/2174)

In supporting the regulations, the Workplace health, safety and welfare Approved Code of Practice and guidance L24 (Second edition) (HSE) expands on these requirements and includes:

- Temperatures inside the workplace should provide reasonable comfort without the need for special clothing. In areas of the workplace other than workrooms (e.g. toilets and changing rooms) temperatures should also be reasonable;
  - Temperature in a workplace should normally be at least 16°C, but if work involves rigorous physical effort, the temperature should be at least 13°C. However, these temperatures may not necessarily provide reasonable comfort, depending on other factors (e.g. air movement, relative humidity, clothing etc.)
- Note** – there is no upper maximum figure specified for workplace temperature
- Where it would be impractical to maintain these temperatures, the guidelines do not apply (e.g. rooms open to the outside, cold stores etc.);
  - If the temperature in a workroom is uncomfortably high, for example because of hot processes or building design, take all reasonable steps to achieve a reasonably comfortable temperature;
  - If a reasonably comfortable temperature cannot be achieved throughout a workroom, local cooling should be provided. This should also be on a temporary basis in normally unoccupied rooms (e.g. storerooms), if more than a short duration of work time is spent there;
  - In extremely hot weather, fans and increased ventilation may be used instead of local cooling;
  - Thermometers should be available at suitable locations in every part of the workplace to allow people to measure temperatures, but do not need to be provided in each workroom.

Factors such as relative humidity, airflow/velocity and radiant temperature can have a greater impact with rising temperatures and should not be forgotten as possible additional

influences on occupancy comfort. The HSE provide further information on these as well as environmental and personal factors that can affect thermal comfort. These can be found at - [HSE - Thermal comfort: The six basic factors](#)

All workplaces are different, so the controls you adopt will need reflect what is best for you and your environment. Opening windows, where you can, can improve air flow but may also have a more negative effect on air quality, especially in urban areas. Well maintained, well operated forced air ventilation, from comfort cooling to air conditioning, will offer greater control as well as preserving air quality.



### 3. What are the implications of extreme weather for my employees health?

The risks posed by hot weather can range from sun burn and dehydration to the exacerbation of pre-existing conditions for individuals with breathing or heart ailments, heat exhaustion and heatstroke.

Where people can become dehydrated for a number of different reasons, symptoms identified by NHS online can include:

- feeling thirsty;
- dark yellow and strong-smelling urine;
- feeling dizzy, lightheaded or tired;
- having a dry mouth, lips and eyes;
- urinating small amounts and fewer than 4 times a day.

Drinking sufficient fluids should see the symptoms resolve, if they do not or individuals continue to feel unwell, they should seek medical advice.

Signs of heat exhaustion, again identified by NHS include:

- a headache;
- dizziness and confusion;
- loss of appetite and feeling sick
- excessive sweating and pale, clammy skin
- cramps in the arms, legs and stomach
- fast breathing or pulse
- a high temperature of 38°C or above
- being very thirsty

If someone is showing signs of heat exhaustion, they need to be cooled down. If people are cooled down within 30 minutes, the condition is not serious.

Heatstroke on the other hand, where it develops, can be very serious and urgent medical attention is needed and it needs to be treated quickly. Symptoms of heatstroke identified by NHS include:

- feeling unwell after 30 minutes of resting in a cool place and drinking plenty of water
- not sweating even while feeling too hot
- having a high temperature of 40°C or above
- fast breathing or shortness of breath
- feeling confused
- having a fit (seizure)
- losing consciousness
- being unresponsive

Understanding the potential issues and being aware of them will help keep your employees and family safe (see also below)

Information provided by NHS can be found at - [Heatwave: how to cope in hot weather - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](https://www.nhs.uk/health/a-z/heatwave-how-to-cope-in-hot-weather)



#### 4. Tips and things to consider in very warm weather

- Optimise your workplace to promote reasonable internal temperatures. Where you don't have any forced air ventilation consider:
  - insulating hot plants or pipes;
  - providing air-cooling plant;
  - shading windows; and
  - siting workstations away from areas subject to radiant heat.
- If using thermometers avoid locating them in areas directly in front of windows or close to radiant heat sources.
- If you have people working regularly outdoors in warm weather make sure they are aware of the precautions they need to take. HSE advice includes: [Free Leaflet - Sun protection, advice for employers of outdoor workers \(hse.gov.uk\)](#); and [Keep your top on \(hse.gov.uk\)](#).
- While employers are not legally required to provide sun cream (it is not considered as personal protective equipment (PPE)), such sun protection use should be encouraged for relevant staff as part of training, especially for outdoor workers.
- Be aware of the risks and manage accordingly, where employees or contractors are working in areas of your building which may be adversely affected by hot weather (roof spaces, plantrooms, workshops etc.).
- As a consequence of the warm weather travel disruptions may be likely, so factor these into your decision making and management.
- Brief first aiders and other relevant staff of be aware of the potential adverse health effects caused by hot weather.
- Advise employees of the measures they can take to be safe in hot weather, these could include:
  - drinking plenty of water/cold drinks and avoid dehydrating liquids (alcohol, caffeine, etc.);
  - wearing appropriate clothing (lightweight, light coloured clothing), hat and sun cream when out;
  - avoiding the sun, where possible between 11am and 3pm; and
  - taking water with you when you travel.
- Review and confirm the setting of any forced air ventilation; systems/comfort cooling to check their balanced and operating properly.
- Adjust working patterns and travel as needed to avoid the hottest parts of the day where possible (11am -3pm).
- Make sure all combustible materials are appropriately stored.
- Enjoy the hot weather safely.

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