



Coping with hot weather and COVID-19

Most of us look forward to the warmer summer months but there are several important risk factors for health which are shared across hot weather and COVID-19.

Whilst everybody is at risk from hot weather, due to the COVID-19 pandemic certain groups may be more exposed to high indoor temperatures, have reduced access to cooler spaces outside the home, and may be isolating away from people who might normally provide support. These groups include:

- those who are more likely to develop a severe illness if they become infected with coronavirus so are limiting their contact with others.
- those who are self-isolating at home because [they or someone in their household has a coronavirus \(COVID-19\) infection](#) or because they have been advised to do so as a [contact of someone with coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#).
- those who are recovering at home following severe illness as a result of COVID-19.

This document provides advice about how to stay well in hot weather, including how to keep your home cool. It tells you who is at greatest risk of ill health from the heat, how to recognise when health may be affected – your own or someone else's – and what to do if you or someone else becomes unwell because of the heat.

Hot weather: at-risk groups

Everybody can be affected by high temperatures, but certain factors increase an individual's risk during a heatwave. These include:

- **older age:** especially those over 75 years old, or those living on their own and who are socially isolated. During the current COVID-19 pandemic many more people than usual may be staying at home and limiting their contact with others.
- **chronic and severe illness:** including heart or lung conditions, diabetes, renal insufficiency, Parkinson's disease or severe mental illness. Many of these health conditions also increase the risk of severe illness from COVID-19.
- **people on certain medications,** including those that affect sweating and temperature control (for example, diuretics, antihistamines, beta-blockers and antipsychotics).
- **inability to adapt behaviour to keep cool:** for example, the very young, those with a disability or are bed bound, those who have dementia.
- **environmental factors can increase exposure to high temperatures:** living in a top floor flat, being homeless, activities or jobs that are in hot places or outdoors and include high levels of physical exertion.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, those who have to stay at home may find that they are more exposed than usual to high indoor temperatures as they are less able to access cool spaces outside of the home such as shaded outdoor areas, swimming pools, and centrally cooled public spaces such as museums and libraries.

Look out for signs of heat related illness

Chronic illnesses that affect the heart and lungs can get worse in hot weather as the body has to work harder to try to stay cool. Heat exhaustion and heatstroke are two potentially serious conditions that can occur if you get too hot:

- **heat exhaustion** is where you become very hot and start to lose water or salt from your body. Common symptoms include weakness, feeling faint, headache, muscle cramps, feeling sick, heavy sweating and intense thirst.
- **heatstroke** is where the body is no longer able to cool itself and a person's body temperature becomes dangerously high. Heatstroke is less common than heat exhaustion, but more serious. Untreated symptoms include confusion, seizures and loss of consciousness.

You can find out more about common signs and symptoms on [NHS website](#).

Advice for keeping healthy

- **drink plenty of fluids and avoid excess alcohol**, Babies, children and older people are particularly vulnerable to dehydration. As we get older, our body does not identify when we are becoming dehydrated as effectively, so it is important to make sure we drink enough. You can find practical advice [here](#).
- **stay cool indoors**: open windows when the air feels cooler outside than inside; shade or cover windows exposed to direct sunlight; move to a cooler part of the house, especially for sleeping.
- **slow down when it is hot**: exertion heats up our bodies so plan any strenuous activities (i.e. exercise, gardening) for when it is cooler, in the morning or evening.
- **cool your skin with water**: a cool wet sponge or flannel, cool water spray, cold packs around the neck and armpits, or a cool, wet sheet can help.
- **stay connected and listen to the weather forecast**, knowing the forecast can help you plan ahead and adapt as necessary.
- **dress appropriately for the weather**: protect yourself against the sun's radiation and keep yourself cool.
- **follow the government's advice about how to protect yourself and others from COVID-19**.

Indoor overheating

Even during a relatively cool summer, one in five homes are likely to overheat. For many people, this makes life uncomfortable and sleeping difficult. For those particularly vulnerable to heat, a hot home can worsen existing health conditions, or even kill.

Advice on keeping your home cool

- **shade or cover windows exposed to direct sunlight**, external shutters or shades are very effective, while internal blinds or curtains are less effective but cheaper.
- **open windows when the air feels cooler outside than inside**, for example, at night. Try to get air flowing through your home, if possible.
- **natural ventilation is an effective way to keep your home cool** without increasing the risk of spreading infections. Fans may be used in domestic settings provided the temperature is below 35°C and national [guidance on self-isolation for COVID-19](#) is followed (i.e. you should avoid contact with others in the household if you have a COVID-19 infection). Aim the fan so that air is pushed towards an open window if possible as this improves ventilation, and do not aim the fan directly at the body.
- **turn off any lights or electrical equipment that are not in use** as these can increase the temperature of your home. Check that fridges and freezers are working properly and ensure your central heating isn't programmed to come on.

Encourage those who may find it more difficult to cope in hot weather to check if they can get help from an NHS volunteer on the Royal Voluntary Service [website](#). If they are in a vulnerable group, they may be eligible to register for support [here](#).