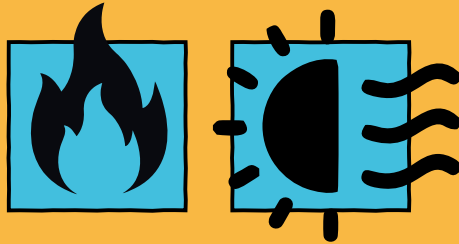


Groundswell

Out of homelessness

Looking after yourself in a heatwave



Climate change means heatwaves are becoming more frequent and more severe in the UK.

This health guide is for people experience homelessness and those supporting them, helping you to stay healthy and safe during the hot weather. You may be living in temporary accommodation, a hostel, sofa surfing, squatting or rough sleeping.

Being exposed to heat and hot weather for long periods can be dangerous and impact your health. Many of the health effects of heatwaves can be prevented and this guide will tell you how to stay cool, look after yourself and others.

Emergency protocol

Hot weather may mean additional support can be offered by your local council including accommodation and support. Your local homelessness services will be notified so please contact them.

How do I know if the heat is affecting me?



Heat exhaustion is where you become very hot and start to lose water or salt from your body. Common symptoms include weakness, dizziness, feeling faint, headache, muscle cramps, feeling sick or being sick, becoming pale, developing heat rash, 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, but more serious. Untreated symptoms include confusion, seizures and loss of consciousness.

If anyone you know has any of these symptoms; hot dry skin and delirium, convulsions and/or unconsciousness, call an ambulance immediately. While waiting for help, move the person to a cool place and put them in the recovery position.

(Source: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/heat-exhaustion-heatstroke/>)



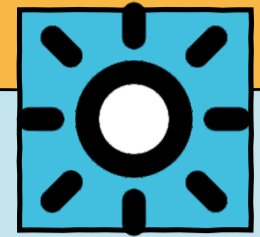
Risk factors

Anyone can be affected by heat, but there is higher risk for:

- People with a chronic illness such as: kidney disease, heart disease or diabetes.
- People with mobility problems – for example, people with Parkinson's disease or who have had a stroke.
- People who may find it hard to keep cool, for example babies and the very young, the bed bound, those with drug or alcohol addictions or people with Alzheimer's disease.
- People who spend a lot of time outside or in hot places – those who live in a top-floor flat, those experiencing homelessness or those whose jobs are outside.
- People who have acute or chronic respiratory illnesses (e.g., asthma, COPD or bronchitis).
- People with mental health issues - some antidepressants and antipsychotic medications can affect temperature regulation.
- If you are on certain medications, you can be more affected by the heat. If you are concerned speak to a GP or pharmacist.

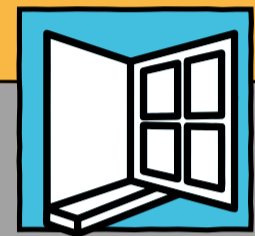
Check storage conditions for prescribed medication – many advise to avoid direct sunlight and hot spaces. Avoid storing medication close to your body.

We spoke to people from across the country who have experience of homelessness, asking them what helps during a heatwave.



Tips for when you are outside:

- Carry a water bottle and refill it regularly with water or juice to stay hydrated. Many cities have water fountains.
- Speak to local services and charities to find out what help is available (e.g. day centres, outreach teams, food banks).
- Take advantage of community resources and public spaces, such as libraries or museums to stay cool during the day.
- Avoid or limit alcohol, substances, caffeine and sugar.
- Wear loose, light-coloured clothing.
- Use a hat or umbrella to protect yourself from the sun.
- Take regular breaks in shaded areas to rest and cool down.
- Apply sunscreen or seek out shaded areas.
- Avoid physical activity when it is hot.
- Try and eat salty food (e.g. a pot noodle or crisps) to replace the salt lost through sweating.



Tips for when you are inside:

- Use the night air to cool down your room or accommodation. If it is safe to do so, open all windows during the night when the outside temperature is lower.
- Keep your living space cool (e.g. hang shades on windows or shut curtains/blinds during the day).
- Hang wet towels to cool down the room air.
- If possible, use an electric fan.
- Take cool showers or baths; or cold packs and wraps, towels, sponging, foot baths, etc.
- Eat less but more frequently.
- Avoid going outside during the hottest time of the day - from 11am-3pm.

Use this guide to remind yourself of the signs of heatstroke and heat exhaustion – look after yourself and look out for others.



Using substances safely during hot weather

Using alcohol and other substances is more dangerous in hot weather for the following reasons:

- It is more difficult for a person to know if they are thirsty or overheating.
- Decision-making abilities are impacted.
- Alcohol dehydrates you and causes increased urine output that makes it more difficult for the body to cool.
- Opioid withdrawal can cause runny nose and eyes, sweating, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhoea, leading to dehydration.
- Stimulants increase body temperature and increase sweating.
- Substances and extreme heat have a lot in common in terms of effects on the body, including dehydration, dizziness, headaches, changes to breathing and changes to heart rate.
- Stimulants such as amphetamines, cocaine and crystal meth disrupt the body's ability to regulate body temperature.

Keeping safe whilst using substances in hot weather:

- Look out for others.
- If you can safely reduce drug use, do so with medical help.
- If you are dependent on drugs (particularly opiates or benzodiazepines), DO NOT stop taking drugs suddenly without medical help.
- Stay out of the heat and direct sunlight.
- If you are on daily supervised consumption and extreme hot weather affects your ability to access your medication, speak immediately to your prescriber/support worker.
- **Do not** drink large quantities of water too quickly to rehydrate little and often is best, throughout the day.



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Everyone has the right to good health and to access healthcare. People experiencing homelessness face health inequalities, they are often excluded from information and services. That's why Groundswell produces accessible health guidance for people experiencing homelessness, so they can make informed decisions about their health.

All our health guides are created alongside people with experience of homelessness and reviewed by relevant professionals.