

## **ARE YOU SUMMER READY?**

With the mercury rising and although the air pollution forecast for Mole Valley over the next few days is only moderate, it is timely to caution that, while most of us welcome hot weather, when it's too hot, there are health risks.

During heatwaves, more people than usual become seriously ill or die. UKHSA estimated 2,985 heat-associated deaths in England during summer 2022 and 2,295 during summer 2023. With the first heat wave now forecast, make sure it does not harm you or anyone you know.

### **The main risks posed by a heatwave are:**

- not drinking enough water - dehydration
- overheating, which can make symptoms worse for people who already have problems with heart, breathing or kidney problems
- heat exhaustion and heatstroke

A heatwave can affect anyone, but the most vulnerable are:

- older people – especially those over 75 and females
- those who live on their own, in top floor flats or in a care home
- people who have a serious or long-term illness including heart or lung conditions, diabetes, kidney disease, Parkinson's disease or some mental health conditions
- those who may find it hard to keep cool – babies and the very young, people who are bed bound, those with drug or alcohol addictions
- medical conditions that may make it harder to recognise overheating, stay hydrated or tolerate cooling measures such as people with sensory processing difficulties, autism, dementia or other conditions
- people who are on multiple medicines that may make them more likely to be badly affected by hot weather
- people who spend a lot of time outside or work in hot places – the homeless or those whose jobs are outside

### **Tips for coping in hot weather for you and your pet:**

Keep out of the heat if you can. If you have to go outside, stay in the shade especially between 11am and 3pm, wear sunscreen, a hat ideally with a wide brim and light clothes, and avoid exercise or activity that makes you hotter.

Those who exercise should do so during the cooler parts of the morning or evening.

Make sure you protect your eyes by wearing sunglasses that are labelled as blocking 99-100% of UV rays or UV absorption up to 400nm, which is the same as 100% UV absorption or with the European CE mark, UKCA mark or British Standard BS EN ISO 12312-1:2013 or BS EN ISO 12312-1:2022.

Never look directly at the sun even with the strongest of sunglasses and be aware that reflected light from sand, water and snow increases the effects of UV light.

Cool yourself down. Have cold food and drinks, avoid alcohol, caffeine and hot drinks, and have a cool shower or put cool water on your skin or clothes.

Always carry a bottle of water with you and drink regularly, even if you do not feel thirsty.

Keep your living space cool. Close windows, blinds and curtains during the day when it is warmer outside and open them at night when the temperature outside has gone down. Electric fans can help if the temperature is below 35 degrees. Check the temperature of rooms, especially where people at higher risk live and sleep.

Look out for others. Check on elderly relatives, neighbours and vulnerable individuals who may be at a higher risk of heat-related illnesses.

Pets are also vulnerable to heat-related illness during periods of hot weather.

- Make sure pets always have access to fresh drinking water, shade and good ventilation.
- Avoid exercising dogs during the hottest parts of the day, especially older pets, flat-faced breeds, or those with heart or lung problems. Walk dogs early in the morning or later in the evening.
- Do the five-second tarmac test before walks — if the ground is too hot for your hand, it is too hot for your dog's paws.
- Rabbits and guinea pigs can struggle in the heat. Frozen water bottles wrapped in towels, damp towels over enclosures, plenty of shade and fresh water can help keep them cool.
- Some cats and dogs with light-coloured or fine fur may benefit from pet-safe sun cream, particularly on ear tips which are vulnerable to sunburn.
- Remember wildlife too — leaving shallow bowls of water out for birds and hedgehogs can help during hot weather.
- Watch for signs of heatstroke in pets such as heavy panting, restlessness, weakness or poor coordination.
- Contact a vet immediately if you are concerned about your pet's health.

### **When to seek medical help:**

Heat exhaustion symptoms can include headaches, dizziness, weakness, loss of appetite, nausea, sweating and cramps. If untreated, it can develop into heatstroke, which is a medical emergency.

If someone is showing signs of heat exhaustion, they need to be cooled down. To do this you should:

- Move them to a cool place.
- Get them to lie down and raise their feet slightly.
- Get them to drink plenty of water. Sports or rehydration drinks are okay.

- Cool their skin – spray or sponge them with cool water and fan them. Cold packs around the armpits or neck are good, too.
  - Stay with them until they're better. They should start to cool down and feel better within 30 minutes.
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- Emergency Care: Call 999 immediately if someone has collapsed, is short of breath, becomes confused, stops sweating, or shows signs of heatstroke.
  - Non-Urgent Care: For less urgent health concerns, use NHS 111 Online, contact your GP, or visit your local pharmacy.

**Further information and advice:**

NHS – Sunscreen and sun safety

NHS – Heatwave: how to cope in hot weather

UKHSA's '[beat the heat](#)' checklist

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

UKHSA – Adverse Weather and Health Plan

Met Office – Heatwave advice

NHS 111 Online

<https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/seasonal/summer>

<https://www.rnib.org.uk/your-eyes/how-to-keep-your-eyes-healthy/protect-your-eyes-from-the-sun/>

<https://www.macularsociety.org/support/daily-life/practical-guides/healthy-living/protecting-your-eyes/>