

Heatwave

HEALTH ADVICE



Serious health risks in a heatwave are heat stress, heat exhaustion and heatstroke:

Heat Stress occurs when the body's means of controlling its internal temperature starts to fail. Air temperature, humidity and clothing are all factors which can cause heat stress. The body's core temperature rises and the heart rate increases.

Heat Exhaustion occurs when the body loses excess amounts of water and salt, typically from sweating. Symptoms may include heavy sweating and a rapid pulse rate.

Heat Stroke is a **medical emergency**. Untreated, heatstroke can quickly damage the brain, heart, kidneys and muscles. The damage worsens the longer treatment is delayed, increasing the risk of serious complications or death.

In heatwaves, significant increases in mortality can occur, especially among older people and those in more vulnerable groups. In Ireland, deaths due to heatwaves have occurred at home, and in residential care facilities and hospitals.

Heatwaves can affect anyone, but those most at risk are:

- Babies and children
- People over 65 years old
- People with underlying health conditions, including problems with breathing, heart function, kidney function and diabetes
- People living with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia

What to do in a Heatwave:

Public Health Advice (HSE):

- Keep cool, wear light, loose and comfortable clothing
- Keep the indoor environment cool:
 - » Minimise unnecessary heating - turn off central heating and any electrical equipment that is not needed
 - » Keep out the heat - cover windows exposed to direct sunlight
 - » Increase air flow through buildings wherever possible
- Evaporative cooling – dampening the skin may help keep you cool
- Use natural ventilation such as open windows when the air feels cooler outside than inside (e.g. at night) and where it is safe and secure to do so
- Electric fans should be used with caution, as they may not be safe for higher temperatures

- Electric fans should not be used where a person may be incubating COVID-19 as this increases risk of transmission to others

Stay Hydrated

- Make sure you have enough water to drink
- You might like to leave drinks in the fridge so they are cool to drink
- An adult needs approximately 2 litres of liquid over 24 hours. This may be less for smaller people or those with medical conditions
- Drink more fluids when you feel any dehydration symptoms. The best fluids to drink are water or oral rehydration sachets – talk to your pharmacist about how to use these safely
- Drink enough during the day so your pee is a pale, clear colour



When to get Medical Help

Contact your GP or the Emergency Department if you are unwell and especially if:

- You are confused and disorientated
- You feel very dizzy
- You have not peed all day
- You feel like your heart is beating fast
- You have fits (seizures)
- You are caring for someone who is drowsy or difficult to wake

These can be signs of serious dehydration that need urgent treatment.

Carers: Making sure a service user drinks enough

The person you are caring for may not have a sense of how much they're drinking. To help them:

- Encourage them to take a drink during mealtimes
- Make drinking a social thing: have a cup of tea together
- Offer foods with a high water content – for example, ice cream, jellies, fruits such as melon, orange, pineapple

