

# **Supporting individuals during heatwaves**

Information for local authorities &  
frontline homelessness  
organisations

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## Information for local authorities & frontline homelessness organisations

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### Overview

Across the UK, SWEP (Severe Weather Emergency Protocol) is activated in periods of extreme high or low temperatures. SWEP is an emergency response to support people experiencing homelessness, and ultimately prevents loss of life. Currently, due to the UK's climate, there is a lot of guidance<sup>1</sup> on cold weather SWEP, but a distinct lack of information on hot weather. Homeless Link are working with the UKHSA (UK Health Security Agency) to develop this guidance but in the meantime, this resource provides some recommendations for the sector and collates learning from Australia, with tips on how to keep cool and how to recognise heat-related illnesses.

People experiencing homelessness are at a heightened risk of developing heat-related illnesses due to their inability to keep cool (owing to a lack of shelter) and reduced access to showers and drinking water. Staff working in frontline homelessness services should familiarise themselves with the information in this briefing, so they are equipped to support individuals during periods of extreme heat.

### Recommendations for the sector

Preparing for the summer months in advance is vital for the homelessness sector. In their 'Dying Homeless Project'<sup>2</sup>, The Museum of Homelessness found that there were actually higher numbers of deaths of individuals in the summer, despite the common belief that more people die in the winter months. Whole community planning and information sharing between organisations is essential to having a coordinated response during hot weather.

As part of The Museum of Homelessness' 'Severe Weather Emergency'<sup>3</sup> investigation, they asked people experiencing homelessness what they thought was best in terms of support during the heat. There was a suggestion to have "one central point where we could go and collect what we need". Homelessness services should have supplies of cool water, sunscreen, hats, sunglasses and if possible, spare loose-fitting clothing to offer to individuals, and services should consider extending their opening times in periods of extreme heat. It is important that information about available provisions are shared with relevant organisations and displayed in places where individuals experiencing homelessness may go, e.g., in train stations, libraries, community centres etc.

In June 2022, the GLA produced a 'Cool Spaces Map'<sup>4</sup>, to enable individuals to locate their nearest freely-accessible indoor/outdoor cool space as well as access to drinking water. All local authorities should consider mapping out available cool spaces, water re-fill

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<sup>1</sup> <https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/guidance-on-cold-weather-provision-swepe-and-heatwaves/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://museumofhomelessness.org/dhp>

<sup>3</sup> <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/623b05f9825aa34cda99921f/t/6423301d2f6abf0202364811/1680027696562/Severe+Weather+Emergency+a+Museum+of+Homelessness+Investigation+2023.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/environment-and-climate-change/climate-change/climate-adaptation/cool-spaces>

points and toilets. It may be worth considering contacting churches and cathedrals, given that these are often older, cooler places, as well as reaching out to local shops, cafés and transport hubs to provide water refill points.

During periods of extreme heat, it is advised that outreach teams visit hotspots regularly to engage with individuals sleeping rough and advise them of cool spaces & provisions available. Volunteers should be utilised to relieve outreach teams at certain times to ensure workers aren't outside at all hours of the day. Outreach teams should consider doing joint shifts with community health teams so that any signs of heat-related illnesses can be acted upon quickly.

## Tips for keeping cool in the heat

Melbourne City Council has produced a fact sheet<sup>5</sup> on top tips to keep cool in the heat. The key points are summarised below.

**Drink plenty of water, even if you do not feel thirsty**

**Keep yourself cool by using wet towels, putting your feet in cold water & taking cool (not cold) showers**

**Spend as much time as possible in cool air-conditioned buildings (day centres, libraries, shopping centres, community centres etc)**

**Stay out of the sun during the hottest part of the day (11am–4pm)**

**Wear a hat and light coloured, loose-fitting clothing**

**When in the sun, wear suncream (at least SPF 30+) and a sunhat**

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/SiteCollectionDocuments/summer-sense-fact-sheet.pdf>

## Recognising heat-related illnesses

The Victoria State Government has released guidance<sup>6</sup> on recognising heat-related illnesses which is summarised in the table below.

Type of illness	Symptoms	What to do
<b>Heat Rash</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cluster of small red spots or clear blisters</li> <li>An itchy or prickling sensation</li> <li>Redness &amp; mild swelling of the affected area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Move to a cooler area and hydrate</li> <li>Keep the affected area dry</li> <li>Wear loose clothing to help prevent over-heating</li> </ul>
<b>Heat Cramps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Muscle pains/spasms usually in the abdomen, arms, or legs</li> <li>Cramps may occur after strenuous activity in a hot environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sit in a cool space and hydrate</li> <li>Rest for a few hours before returning to activity</li> <li>See a doctor if cramps persist.</li> </ul>
<b>Heat Exhaustion</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Paleness &amp; sweating</li> <li>Rapid heart rate</li> <li>Muscle cramps</li> <li>Nausea &amp; vomiting</li> <li>Dizziness/fainting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lie down in a cool area</li> <li>Remove outer clothing</li> <li>Use cool water or wet cloths to cool skin</li> <li>Hydrate (if fully conscious)</li> <li>Seek medical advice or call an ambulance if no improvements.</li> </ul>
<b>Heatstroke</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>A life-threatening emergency</b></li> <li>Same symptoms as heat exhaustion, but sweating stops</li> <li>Mental condition worsens – confusion</li> <li>Stroke-like symptoms or collapsing</li> <li>Seizures</li> <li>Unconsciousness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Call for an ambulance</li> <li>Whilst waiting for emergency help, lie in a cool, shaded area.</li> <li>Remove clothing and wet skin with cool water</li> <li>Hydrate (if fully conscious)</li> <li>If unconscious, position individual on their side and clear their airway.</li> </ul>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/heat-stress-and-heat-related-illness#practical-hot-weather-resources>

## Resources & information

### Australian Resources

- Melbourne City Council has a host of information and resources on their [website](#) about heatwaves, including [top tips on how to keep cool in the heat](#).
- The Victoria State Government has a [webpage](#) related to heat-related illnesses
- The Victorian Council of Social services has produced a [report](#) which includes how to support staff in high risk industries and community services.

### UK Resources

- The UKHSA has released a new [Adverse Weather and Health Plan](#) (AWHP) as well as [guidance on supporting people sleeping rough before and during hot weather](#).
- The GLA has produced London Specific [Heat SWEP guidance](#).
- The Government [website](#) hosts a range of guidance for supporting people during a heatwave.
- The Government has produced '[Beat the heat](#)' guidance which outlines how to stay safe in hot weather.
- Homeless Link has collated some [good practice case studies](#) from frontline homelessness organisations who supported people sleeping rough during a hot weather SWEP activation.
- Museum of Homeless has produced a research report on '[Severe Weather Emergency](#)' which looks at what councils are doing during periods of extreme weather and provides recommendations and feedback.

## What We Do

Homeless Link is the national membership charity for frontline homelessness services. We work to improve services through research, guidance and learning, and campaign for policy change that will ensure everyone has a place to call home and the support they need to keep it.

## Homeless Link

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## Let's End Homelessness Together

