

For managers and supervisors in health and social care

Planning for a heatwave in health and social care

Making preparations in advance of hot summer weather will enable you to reduce ill-health and mortality caused by heatwaves. The following information includes suggested steps you can take if you are a manager or supervisor in health and social care.

Heatwaves can lead to health problems and increased mortality

The changing climate means that we can expect average temperatures to rise and heatwaves to become more common. High temperatures can be dangerous for everyone, but the following groups are particularly vulnerable and at risk: elderly people, those with chronic health conditions, people with disabilities, young children, pregnant women and people taking certain medication. This means that it is important to take preventive measures.

Inform

Inform all employees of preparations for heatwaves at a workplace meeting. Staff should have read relevant material and undertaken a short training course before the summer, and guidance must quickly be made available to all staff when there is a heatwave. It is important that staff are aware of the negative effects excessive heat can have on elderly people and other risk groups. Discuss with employees how your organisation can best prepare for a heatwave.

Think about options you have for informing care recipients and their families and friends of action that should be taken. In addition to various professionals providing verbal information, it may be helpful to put leaflets and notices in public spaces.

This will help get information to people in the at-risk groups who are not in regular contact with care services.



Identify

Identify individuals who are particularly at risk. Old age, a number of chronic health conditions, intellectual and physical disabilities and the use of certain medication can make an individual particularly vulnerable in a heatwave. More detailed information about this can be found in the guidance for doctors and nurses, see folkhalsomyndigheten.se/varmebolja.



It is preferable if you can offer advice to service users and their families before the summer, perhaps in the context of a visit or appointment that has already been scheduled.

Plan

Ensure that there are members of staff designated to receive warnings about heatwaves, including during holiday periods, and that these staff members know where the information is and how it needs to be distributed. SMHI, the Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute, sends out notices and warnings via smhi.se, its mobile app, and on national radio stations P1 and P4. The information is also available on krisinformation.se.

Have preparations in place to reprioritise your work and focus on healthcare rather than less urgent services. Make sure you also monitor how your staff are managing in the heat and the potentially increased workload. Consider calling in extra staff. Review routines for correct storage of temperature-sensitive pharmaceuticals during heatwaves.

Assess the use of electric fans, as they can have a dehydrating effect. It is still not clear under what conditions fans do more good than harm.

More information about the health effects of heatwaves and guidance on action plans and advice for healthcare staff and at-risk groups can be found on the Public Health Agency of Sweden's website: folkhalsomyndigheten.se/varmebolja



Accommodation: If it is not possible to keep the whole building at normal room temperature, you should arrange at least one cool space in each unit or department for people in at-risk groups to use.

The temperature may vary a lot from room to room and so all rooms or apartments should have a thermometer, including all public spaces. Take measures to reduce solar radiation, such as light-coloured curtains, blinds and awnings. Ensure that portable air conditioning is available for use when needed. Check that windows can be opened to let the air in during the cooler times of day. A long term plan might include planting trees for shade.

Home care service: Some homes can get very hot in the summer. Discuss with staff whether there are homes in your area that are particularly vulnerable, whether you need to change the frequency of visits or other treatment procedures, and whether it is possible to lower the indoor temperature. Service users should be advised to get themselves an indoor thermometer. Provide information and checklists to at-risk groups and their families.



Distribute materials

The following materials are available on the Public Health Agency of Sweden's website for you to use and distribute:

- Two targeted information leaflets for health and social care staff and for at-risk groups and their families that give information about the risks of heat, at-risk groups and practical advice.
- Two short animated films with information for health and social care staff and for at-risk groups and their families.
- A short online training course for health and social care staff.
- Guidance for doctors and nurses – with specific advice including information about medication.
- Guidance for health and social care staff – important that this is also given to holiday relief staff.
- Advice for at-risk groups and their families – share and discuss with at-risk groups and their families on home visits, put up on noticeboards, put in waiting rooms and public spaces, etc.

Please see the Public Health Agency of Sweden's website for materials you can use or distribute.
folkhalsomyndigheten.se/varmebolja

This guidance has been produced with the help of WHO's 'Advice on preventing health effects of heat' (2011) and the Public Health Agency of Sweden's report 'Health effects from heatwaves' (2022) [in Swedish].

