

For you, your friends and family

# Guidance in the event of a heatwave

## 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. Because we are not very accustomed to high temperatures in Sweden, our health can be affected at a much lower temperature than in areas such as southern Europe.

## Are you, or a member of your family, in one of the at-risk groups?

Extreme heat is dangerous for all of us, but in a heatwave some people need to take special care of themselves. This applies particularly to:

- **Elderly people.** In older years, our ability to regulate our body temperature and feel thirst can decline.
- **People with chronic health conditions.** Health problems such as cardiovascular diseases, pulmonary diseases, diseases of the renal system, dementia, diabetes and mental illness increase the vulnerability.
- **People with disabilities.** People with intellectual disabilities may find it more difficult to recognise risks and their bodies' warning signals. In people with physical disabilities, the body's signalling pathways may not work properly. They may also need practical assistance with things such as extra fluids, changing clothes and relocating to a cooler location.
- **Young children and pregnant women** can be particularly vulnerable in hot weather. Young children have often not yet developed the ability to sweat. Pregnant women are at some increased risk of giving birth prematurely.
- **People taking medication.** Some medication affects the body's ability to adjust its temperature and fluid balance, for example diuretics or anti-depressives and anti-psychotics.



## How does heat affect the body?

Heat makes superficial blood vessels dilate and we sweat more heavily. If we are not able to take in enough fluid to compensate for the additional sweating, our blood becomes more concentrated and there will be a greater risk of blood clots. If the heart cannot cope with the extra pumping required, serious heart failure may result. Heat-related deaths in elderly people are usually due to circulation problems. Headaches and feeling sick may be early signs of heatstroke.

Heatstroke can be life-threatening. If you get heatstroke, your body temperature will be above 40 degrees Celsius and other symptoms may include vomiting, visual disturbances, dizziness, confusion and a rapid pulse. It is important that you relocate to a cool place, drink fluids and cool down your body.

Antipyretics (medication to reduce body temperature) should not be taken in the event of heat exhaustion or heatstroke as they can make these conditions worse.

## Heat warnings from SMHI

SMHI, the Swedish Meteorological and Hydrological Institute, issues notices and warnings about high temperatures so that measures can be put in place locally in time to assist vulnerable groups in the community. SMHI will issue the following:

- A notice about high temperatures when the forecast indicates that the maximum temperature will be at least 26 degrees Celsius for three days in a row.
- Yellow warning when the maximum daily temperature is expected to reach 30 degrees Celsius or more, for three to four days in a row.
- Orange warning when the maximum daily temperature is expected to reach 30 degrees Celsius for five days in a row, or if the daily maximum temperature is expected to reach 33 degrees Celsius for at least three days in a row.

SMHI sends out notices and warnings via [smhi.se](https://smhi.se), its mobile app, and on national radio stations P1 and P4. The information is also available on [krisinformation.se](https://krisinformation.se).

# What to do during a heatwave

Hot summer weather can be dangerous for everyone, particularly for elderly people, those with chronic health conditions and people with a disability, but also for young children, those who are pregnant and people taking medication. Here are some useful tips.



**PAY ATTENTION TO INDOOR TEMPERATURES** Health problems are likely to increase as soon as indoor temperatures rise. Risks increase significantly when the outdoor temperature reaches 26°C or above for three days in a row.



**DRINK MORE FLUIDS** Do not wait until you feel thirsty. Eat food with a high water content, such as fruit and vegetables. Avoid large amounts of sweetened drinks and alcohol. Remember that some people may need help to hydrate.



**KEEP YOUR LIVING SPACE COOL** Make use of curtains, blinds and awnings. Try to stay in the coolest place in your home. Open the windows at night when the outside temperature is lower.



**COOL YOURSELF** A cool shower works best. Alternatively, place a wet towel around your neck. Wear loose clothing made of natural fabrics, as these will be cooler than tight-fitting synthetics.

“Check in on your friends and family, and share these tips with them.”



**TAKE IT EASY** Avoid strenuous physical activity during the hottest time of the day.



**STORE YOUR MEDICATION CORRECTLY** If the medication is temperature-sensitive there is storage information on the packaging or in the package leaflet.

**BE ALERT** Warning signals include a higher body temperature and a more rapid pulse or breathing rate, unexpected dizziness and abnormal tiredness. A dry mouth and reduced urination may be signs that you are dehydrated. If you are taking any medication, e.g. diuretics, you may need to adjust the dose.

Contact healthcare services for specific advice on your own health or that of a friend or family member.

Call **1177** for healthcare advice or for help finding the right healthcare service. You can phone or visit the website **1177.se** around the clock.

