

Working in the Sun and Heat

Extreme heat is both an environmental and occupational hazard, whilst significant exposure to UV radiation in sunlight can damage skin and cause skin cancer. If your work involves exposure to high levels of heat and/or you work outside then your employer should risk assess these factors.

Sun safety code

- Take care not to burn; it can take as little as 10 minutes.
- Cover up with loose clothing. Keep your clothing on so that you do not expose unprotected areas.
- Wear a wide brimmed hat or a safety helmet with a hanging flap which protects the back of the neck.
- Wash frequently to remove sweat.
- Seek shade during the hottest part of the day and take breaks in the shade.
- Drink plenty of water frequently.
- Apply high factor sunscreen generously and frequently to any parts of the body exposed to the sun.
- Regularly check skin; look for any changed or newly formed moles or any skin discoloration, especially around the nose and eyes, or on the backs of hands. Consult a doctor if any moles grow, change or start to bleed.



Who has increased risks of skin damage and skin cancer?

- People with pale skin, fair or red hair, freckles or a large number of moles.
- Those with a family history of skin cancer or who have excessive exposure to sunlight or UV light from bright conditions, such as outdoor workers.

What is heat stress?

Heat stress occurs when the body is unable to cool itself by sweating. It can lead to heat exhaustion or heat stroke. Symptoms include:

- headache
- dizziness
- light-headedness
- fainting
- weakness
- moist skin
- mood changes, irritability, confusion
- nausea, vomiting.

The symptoms of heat exhaustion include fatigue, giddiness, nausea, headache, clammy skin.

Heat stroke will usually present as hot dry skin, confusion, convulsions and eventual loss of consciousness. This is the most severe disorder and can result in permanent brain damage or death if not detected at an early stage.

Heat stress is a risk for workers within high temperature/humidity workplaces, for strenuous work and work constrained by personal protective clothing.

Did you know?

- **Fact 1:** UV (ultraviolet) radiation from the sun is the major cause of skin cancer.
- **Fact 2:** In the UK over 17,500 people are diagnosed with skin cancer each year – that's 48 a day.
- **Fact 3:** Employees working outside should consider exposure to UV radiation as an occupational health hazard.

“Outdoor workers can experience excessive exposure to the sun’s UV radiation and are therefore more at risk from skin cancer if precautions are not taken”

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Measures to control heat stress

- Remove or reduce heat sources where possible.
- Control the temperature – change processes, use fans and air conditioning.
- Regulate the length of exposure to hot environments.
- Drink water to prevent dehydration.

Factors that affect how hot you feel

There are a number of factors that determine the impact of heat on your body and these include:

- Air velocity – how fast air moves past your body.
- Humidity – high humidity environments have a lot of water vapour in the air, which prevents the evaporation of sweat from the skin.
- Levels of physical work – the more physical work a person does, the more heat they will produce and the more that will need to be lost to keep them cool.
- Physical characteristics – factors such as size, weight, age, fitness level and sex can all have an impact on how a person manages heat stress.
- Clothing and PPE – clothing contributes to thermal comfort or discomfort as does the wearing of PPE. Workwear should be compatible with the work environment whilst PPE should offer the necessary protection, ideally without compromising thermal comfort.

When driving in hot weather:

- Check the roadworthiness of the vehicle.
- Use air conditioning; an outside temperature of 28°C can quickly bring a car's interior to well over 50°C.
- Park in shaded areas, use a sun shield over the windscreen and cover the metal parts of seat restraints to keep them from becoming too hot.
- Keep a container of water.
- Take regular breaks, as concentration levels are likely to drop in hot weather and you may become drowsy.
- Try to plan your journey to avoid the hottest part of the day if you can.
- Carry moist wipes.
- Pack a summer travel kit (sun tan lotion, a hat, sunglasses, prescription medication and snacks that won't be affected by the heat).
- Check the weather forecast for both the route and destination.
- Have a mobile phone and charger for emergency calls.

Do you know...?

In offices and other environments, the temperature in workplaces must be reasonable. There is no maximum working temperature, or when it is too hot to work. However, employers should follow health and safety law by:

- Keeping the temperature at a comfortable level, sometimes known as thermal comfort.
- Providing clean fresh air.

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