

Hot weather Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (H-SWEP): Guidance and activation procedure for London (2023)

1. Who is this for?

This H-SWEP guidance has been produced for London local authority rough sleeping lead officers, and anyone involved in the provision of services for people sleeping rough in the capital. It may also be useful to those considering their response to heatwaves (e.g. local resilience forums).

Other useful resources are available, such as UKHSA guidance: “Supporting people sleeping rough before and during hot weather”¹, and Homeless Link² resources.

This guidance was produced in 2023, using input from a rapid evidence review, experience from 2022, and discussion by a task and finish group. It will be kept under review and may be updated for summer 2024, if needed. It provides a series of recommendations which local authorities will choose to deliver in a variety of different ways based on local circumstances.

If you have any questions or comments regarding this document, please contact: roughsleepingcommissioning@london.gov.uk

2. What is SWEP?

Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) is an emergency humanitarian response to severe weather conditions, the primary aim of which is to preserve life. Each borough is expected to make its own local SWEP response for those sleeping rough in the area. The local response should be informed by an assessment of need undertaken at the borough level.

3. Why is H-SWEP guidance needed?

Climate change means we can now expect regular episodes of dangerously high temperatures in London and therefore since summer 2022, GLA has issued H-SWEP guidance. Most heat-related illness and deaths are preventable with appropriate action. UKHSA has an interim estimate of 2,803 heatwave-associated excess deaths in England’s 65+ general population in 2022³ - there is no estimate available specifically for the rough sleeping population. Increasing temperatures (in excess of 25°C) are associated with excess heat-related deaths, with higher temperatures associated with greater numbers of excess deaths.

People sleeping rough have a higher risk of poor health outcomes or even death during hot weather for three key reasons. First, they are likely to have greater levels of exposure to heat – as they may be exposed to direct sun and the higher temperatures in many built-up environments. Second, they are likely to be more vulnerable to the effect of heat due to underlying health conditions or other factors, such as drug or alcohol use, that affect their ability to adapt their behaviours to the increased temperatures. Third, they may be less able to take preventative steps or

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hot-weather-and-health-supporting-vulnerable-people/supporting-vulnerable-people-before-and-during-hot-weather-people-homeless-and-sleeping-rough>

² <https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/hot-weather-swep/>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/heat-mortality-monitoring-reports/heat-mortality-monitoring-report-2022>

respond to extreme heat for other reasons related to their circumstances, especially social exclusion and lack of financial or other resources.

4. When will action be needed and the activation procedure

Heat health alerts⁴ (HHA) are issued by UKHSA in partnership with the Met Office.⁵ The core alerting season is between 1 June and 15 September. Alerts can be issued outside of this, but this is when heatwaves are most likely to occur.

The heat health alerts aim to flag what impact heat will have. They are based on a combination of the impact the weather conditions could have, and the likelihood of those impacts. Unlike winter SWEP the ‘trigger’ is not solely based on forecast temperature. They have four levels:

Alert level	What this level indicates	Possible scenario when this is triggered
Green (preparedness)	No alert will be issued as the conditions are likely to have minimal impact and health – however, planning and preparations are recommended.	
Yellow (response)	These alerts cover a range of situations, but may be issued when people who are more vulnerable (such as those who are rough sleeping) may struggle to cope. A yellow alert may also be issued if the confidence in the weather forecast is low, so has the potential to be upgraded.	This may be triggered when forecasted temperatures in London approach 30°C for a few days, with high overnight temperatures – but a yellow alert could be issued due to a range of factors. ⁶
Amber (enhanced response)	An amber alert indicates that weather impacts are likely to be felt across the whole health service, with potential for the whole population to be at risk. Non-health sectors may also start to observe impacts and a more significant coordinated response may be required.	This this may be triggered when forecasted temperatures in London approach 32°C – but an amber alert could be issued due to a range of factors.
Red (emergency response)	A red alert would indicate significant risk to life for even the healthy population. It may mean that national critical infrastructure failures are anticipated – such as generators and power outages or major roads and rail lines closed.	

⁴ To sign up for the UKHSA heat health alerts, users must register here <https://forms.office.com/pages/responsepage.aspx?id=mRRO7jVKLkutR188-d6GZn06Ss-xPLpCuYeyOZ-eFiFUMEVIMDRTOE5FVzFFMONXNjFMWUIWMkJVMCQIQCNOPWcu>

⁵ Please note, the Met Office deliver the national severe weather warning service which is triggered at higher temperatures likely to affect the general public and have cross-sectoral impacts. Both services are intended to be aligned. It should be noted that the HHA and National Severe Weather Warning Service Extreme Heat system are both separate to the Met Office Heatwave Definition. For more information, please see https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1153477/User-Guide-impact-based-weather-and-health-alerting-system.pdf

⁶ The possible temperatures suggested here are based on information which has been provided to the GLA about the indicative thresholds for different levels of alert. However, forecast maximum temperatures are only one factor that UKHSA consider when setting the alert level so alerts may be issued at temperatures different to those stated here. The GLA will keep this under review across the summer and consider any implications for this guidance.

Activation procedure

The GLA will activate H-SWEP in line with the UKHSA's heat health alerts. If the UKHSA's heat health planner suggests an Amber or Red alert is due to start in the next 5 days, a notification will be circulated by the GLA to key SWEP contacts for each borough.

- On the morning that a **Yellow** alert commences, the GLA will notify SWEP contacts that additional preparations and enhanced outreach are advised.
- On the morning that an **Amber or Red alert** for London commences, the GLA will activate H-SWEP.
- Should the Heat Health alert be upgraded or downgraded between Yellow, Amber or Red, the GLA will notify SWEP contacts of this change.
- If the alert is extended beyond the period which was originally stated, the GLA will issue a SWEP continuation notification.
- When a Heat Health alert is downgraded below Amber the GLA will deactivate SWEP.

If the Heat Health alert suggests that Amber or Red will be reached during a weekend or bank holiday, SWEP will be activated on the working day immediately preceding this. Similarly, H-SWEP will only be modified or deactivated on a working day.

When sending H-SWEP activation, continuation or deactivation notifications, the GLA will endeavour to email SWEP contacts before 09:30am on the morning in question.

5. What action is recommended?

In advance of heat health alerts

Plan response

Identify suitable cool spaces for use during the day (see detail below), and what accommodation options could be suitable during periods of hot weather (as well as how to prevent rooms becoming too hot)⁷. This may include purchasing room thermometers or other equipment to help indoor areas or people stay cool.

Build your response network

Make links with others who can mobilise and/or support a response. This could be via the local resilience forum, who will also have plans to respond to heat. It is likely to include links to community groups and other local services who may be able to support a response during hot weather, including emergency services and those who may also engage with people who are sleeping rough. Voluntary and faith sector, health and veterinary care in the local area will all play a key role in the response.

A local resilience forum (LRF) is a multi-agency partnership made up of representatives from local public services, including the emergency services, local authorities, the NHS, the Environment Agency and others. LRFs aim to plan and prepare for localised incidents and catastrophic emergencies, such as extreme heat. They work to identify potential risks and produce emergency plans to either prevent

⁷ This could include the suggestions from the 'Beat the Heat' guidance

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/heatwave-plan-for-england/beat-the-heat-keep-cool-at-home-checklist>

or mitigate the impact of any incident on their local communities. It is worth checking your plans are consistent with and build upon local resilience arrangements.

Train staff and volunteers

This may include sharing materials that explain the risk of heat for people's health, what to be aware of, and what steps can be taken to prepare for, and respond to, a heat health alert. This should also include information about preventing ill health during hot weather, and the signs and symptoms of heat-related illness. Given that periods of extremely hot weather may also endanger staff and volunteer health, consider in advance their health needs and appropriate adjustments. It is worth checking the latest available advice for the general population: [Beat the Heat](#).

Assess individual vulnerability to heat

It may be helpful to identify individuals with risk factors that make them more vulnerable to heat ahead of a heatwave event. This could involve understanding if someone who is rough sleeping has particular risk factors that could mean they are more vulnerable during periods of hot weather. Where possible, it's advised that an assessment is made of their level of exposure to extreme heat, any health conditions they have, and their likelihood of engaging with a response (as detailed in the next section).

Prepare resources

This could include a local map of cool spaces⁸ and water fountains⁹, and resources for people who are sleeping rough that encourage them to look after their health in hot weather¹⁰. Lack of access to toilets can mean people avoid drinking fluids which exacerbates dehydration, so resources could include details of nearby public toilets¹¹. General guidance¹² suggests the following can all help people stay well:

- Find somewhere cool
- Drink plenty of fluids and avoid excess alcohol
- Slow down when it's hot
- Cool your skin with water, slow down and drink water
- Dress appropriately for the weather

During yellow alert: enhanced outreach

Outreach teams should ensure that people who are sleeping rough are:

- offered advice about keeping cool, such as avoiding direct sun (including seeking shade)
- offered water or other ways to stay hydrated
- offered, or signposted to, other useful resources, such as appropriate clothing (e.g. loose cotton, hats, sunglasses) or suncream

⁸ <https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/environment-and-climate-change/climate-change/climate-adaptation/cool-spaces>

⁹ More information available here: <https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/environment-and-climate-change/waste-and-recycling/single-use-plastic-bottles/drinking-fountains-london>

¹⁰ <https://groundswell.org.uk/resources/>

¹¹ <https://tfl.gov.uk/help-and-contact/public-toilets-in-london>

¹² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/beat-the-heat-hot-weather-advice/beat-the-heat-staying-safe-in-hot-weather>

- signposted to places where they could cool down (either places that are generally available, such as those on the GLA Cool Spaces map, or places specifically catering for people who are rough sleeping if available)
- assessed for particular vulnerability to heat, especially if they have not previously been assessed¹³
- where identified as more vulnerable, are a focus for further action
- checked for any signs of heat-related illness and early signs of dehydration¹⁴

To do this effectively, this should:

- draw on support from other services, such as those who are part of the local resilience forum and others working with this group, such as voluntary sector organisations, drug and alcohol treatment providers and others
- ensure those who interacting with people sleeping rough are aware of the signs and symptoms of dehydration, heat-related illness, and symptoms of heatstroke (which is a medical emergency) - as they can play a crucial role in preventing dehydration and people becoming unwell
- use an assessment tool that considers heat-related vulnerability
- consider what might encourage someone to engage with advice and offers about keeping cool
- consider timing and delivery of outreach shifts – this will need to balance outreach during the day as well as ways to prevent staff or volunteers being exposed to extreme heat.

During amber alert: cool spaces and accommodation

In addition to the actions listed for a yellow alert, local authorities are encouraged to implement the following measures during an amber alert, when H-SWEP will be activated:

Cool spaces:

Ensure that suitable cool spaces are available to people sleeping rough, and people are encouraged to take up this offer (particularly those who are more vulnerable). No restrictions should be placed on use of cool spaces (i.e. someone would not need to be eligible for public funds or have connections to the local area).

A cool space for this population should ideally:

- Be open at least 11am-5pm, including weekends
- Be cooler than the outside temperature, ideally aiming for 26°C or below
- Allow people to physically rest
- Offer a range of ways to rehydrate (water, ice lollies, non-alcoholic beverages and/or food)
- Be accessible without requiring extensive travel
- Be inclusive and ‘appealing’, particularly where the only cool space available is designed for the general public

¹³ The Find and Treat team can provide clinical advice if required, where a vulnerability may be unclear. They are available during office hours via 0203 447 9842. This is not for medical emergencies or a substitute for local primary care provision.

¹⁴ <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/heat-exhaustion-heatstroke/>

- Consider safe spaces and where possible offer separate areas dependent on specific needs¹⁵
- Have staff trained to recognise signs and symptoms of heat-related illness and dehydration

They could also:

- Allow the storage of belongings
- Welcome pets, or support could be sought from organisations such as Dogs on the Streets
- Link with other, useful services for people sleeping rough
- Offer other means of cooling down, such as showers, wet towels or water sources

Accommodation:

Ensure that suitable emergency accommodation is available for people sleeping rough who are more vulnerable during periods of hot weather. Accommodation should be prioritised for the most vulnerable (see section 6).

- To assist with planning, councils should identify in advance of Amber activation anyone sleeping rough who may be extremely vulnerable to high temperatures.
- The number of emergency accommodation bedspaces available locally ought to be proportionate to the number of people identified.
- The GLA will use any available bedspaces in its pan-London supported accommodation and hubs as 'overflow' emergency accommodation, should there be additional high-risk cases which need assistance in areas providing emergency SWEP accommodation that has reached capacity.
- Guidance on referrals into available pan-London overflow provision will be communicated at the start of a Hot Weather SWEP period.

Accommodation would need to be:

- Cooler than the outside temperature, ideally aiming for 26°C or below
- Prevented from getting too hot¹⁶ (e.g. through the ability to ventilate, especially at night; use of window coverings to prevent direct sunlight)

Consideration should be made about how to encourage take up of suitable accommodation.

Even in accommodation, during periods of high temperature there will be an ongoing risk to people who are more vulnerable. Consider conducting regular welfare checks to spot and respond to signs of heat-related illness for people who are in accommodation.

Wherever possible, accommodation should be:

¹⁵ There is more information about creating a safe environment on page 31 of this toolkit https://homelesslink-1b54.kxcdn.com/media/documents/SWEP_and_Winter_Provision_Toolkit_2022_JP020822_002.pdf

¹⁶ This could include the suggestions from the 'Beat the Heat' guidance <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/heatwave-plan-for-england/beat-the-heat-keep-cool-at-home-checklist>

- low threshold, with no restrictions on entry (e.g. local connection or eligibility for public funds)
- operated under the 'In for Good' principle so that no one should be asked to leave until fully assessed and a support plan put in place to help end their rough sleeping.

The GLA will also re-allocate resources, such as staff time, to support the H-SWEP response.

Staff and volunteer welfare

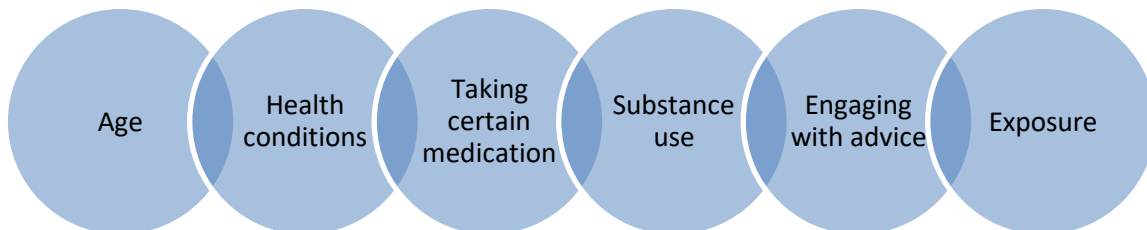
During an amber and red alert, consideration should be made for staff/volunteer welfare, as their health may also be at risk. Refer to existing guidance about this, such as from the Health and Safety Executive.¹⁷

During red alert

In addition to the actions suggested for yellow and amber alerts, consider how the response could be maintained when other sectors may be impacted (e.g. health, transport, utilities, emergency services) or if there was disruption caused by other concurrent risks (such as power outages, fire and water shortages).

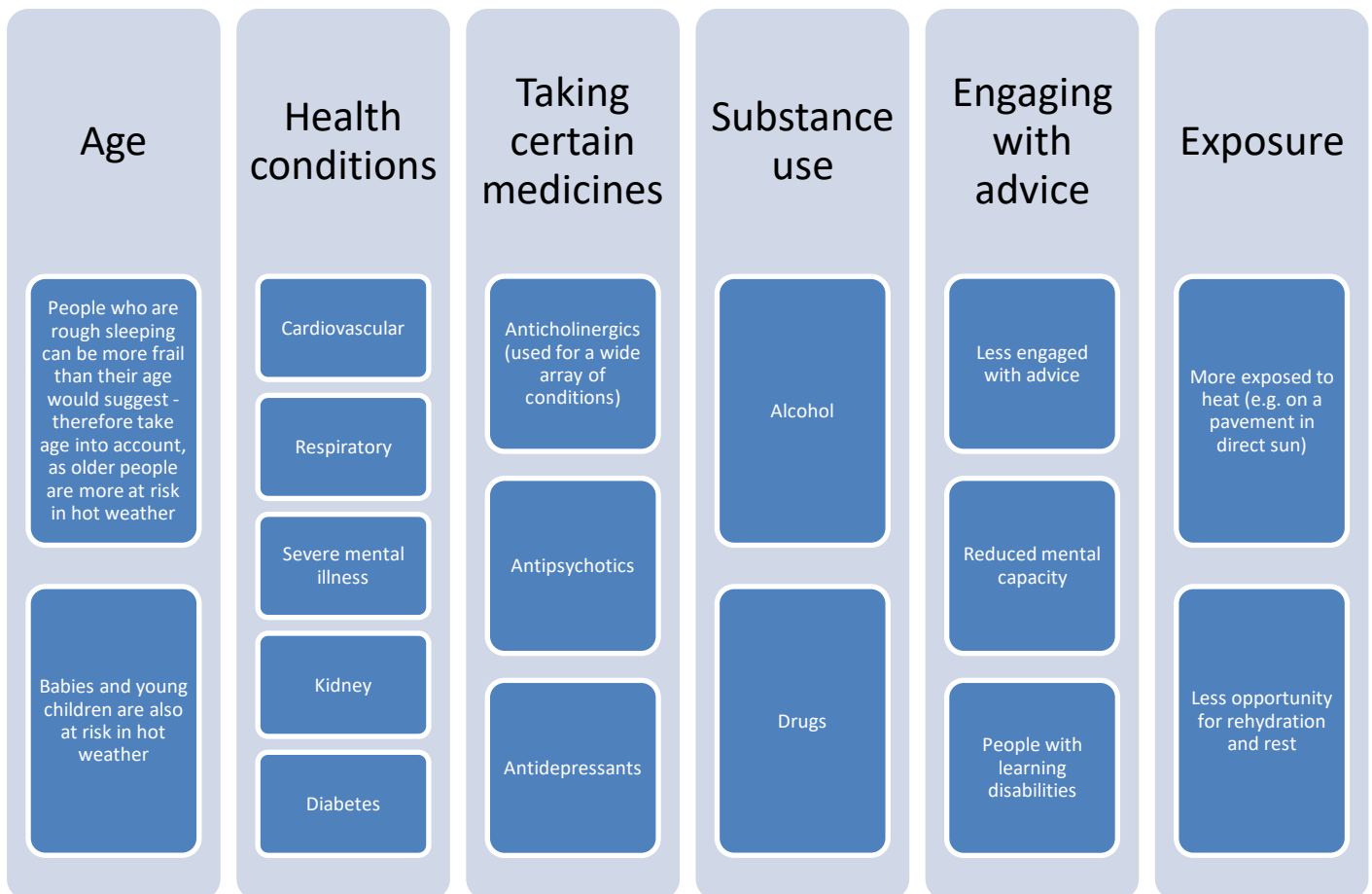
6. Who is more vulnerable to heat impacting their health?

Several factors (age, mental and physical health conditions, medication¹⁸, substance use, exposure, likelihood to follow advice) may make someone more vulnerable to heat having a negative impact on their health. These individual factors may be mild to severe. Any assessment of vulnerability should consider the following factors, especially if there are combinations of them.



¹⁷ <https://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/employer/outdoor-working.htm>

¹⁸ Medicines such as anticholinergics, antipsychotics and antidepressants all contribute to being more at risk in heat. They can affect the processes through which the body usually regulates heat. An anticholinergic is a type of medication that works by blocking a chemical in your body called acetylcholine. Acetylcholine is used in many parts of your body and helps you stay alert, keep a steady heart rate, breathe, digest food, sweat and empty your bladder. Anticholinergic medications act on many parts of the body at the same time.



Adapting or using relevant questions from an assessment tool such as the [mini-CHRISP Plus](#)¹⁹ may assist in identifying these.

7. What are heat related illnesses?

The main causes of illness and death during a heatwave are exacerbation of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. Chronic illnesses can get worse in hot weather.

Many heat-related illnesses are preventable, including dehydration. Heat exhaustion and heatstroke are two potentially serious conditions that can occur if you get too hot.

- dehydration can be gradual, and may mean someone feels thirsty, dizzy, lightheaded or tired. Individuals can be reminded to keep an eye on the colour of their urine²⁰
- heat exhaustion is where someone becomes very hot and start to lose water or salt from their body. Common symptoms include weakness, feeling faint, headache, muscle cramps, feeling sick, heavy sweating and intense thirst

¹⁹ https://www.transformationpartnersinhealthandcare.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Mini-CHRISP-Plus-Tool-Final-191120_.pdf

²⁰ <https://www.infectionpreventioncontrol.co.uk/content/uploads/2022/11/Urine-colour-guide-October-2022.pdf>

- heatstroke is where the body is no longer able to cool itself and a person's body temperature becomes dangerously high. Heatstroke is less common, but more serious. Untreated symptoms include confusion, seizures and loss of consciousness

More information and what action to take are available from [the NHS](#)

8. How will this guidance be monitored and reviewed?

The heat health alert system has been updated this year, so the impact and implementation of this guidance will be kept under review in summer 2023 and if needed, will be revised for 2024. We are keen to understand how this guidance has been used and how it could be improved. We would also find any data or information on local responses (beyond routine information collection) very useful – but do not wish for this to be a barrier to implementation.