

## **Introduction: -**

This guidance is intended to help UNISON members working within healthcare during the heat wave. It has been issued to support and complement other national information from both the relevant government departments and employers and is intended to aid discussions, development and monitoring of contingency plans. Whilst there is no maximum temperature established in Health and Safety legislation, there are a number of measures which staff and organisations can take to protect their health and well being and those in their care. The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 places a legal duty on employers to provide a working environment which as far as is reasonably practicable is safe and without risks to health. Employers must assess risks and introduce preventative measures based on these assessments under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. UNISON has produced detailed guidance on temperature, which you should read and consider<sup>1</sup>.

Although the current hot weather is level one<sup>2</sup>, which means that Temperatures are not expected to reach heatwave threshold values until further notice, branches, regions and employers will need to monitor their environments accordingly as the situation will alter over the summer months.

We have sought to capture key information which UNISON Branches and members may wish to consider, this is not an exhaustive list but a collection of things which may enable branches and members to facilitate better care for patients, staff and visitors during this time.

**UNISON Health Branches** may want to consider some or all of the following:

- Ensuring that this is placed on the agenda of your joint staff forum;
- Ensure that your employer/s have carried out risk assessments which look at how to cope with the appropriate weather conditions;
- Health & Safety representatives have an important role during this time and we would encourage where ever possible risk assessments being undertaken by both the management and staff side relevant H&S officers;
- Ensure that estate departments have additional fans and portable air conditions available and ready for use. When not used this equipment becomes dusty and unclean so before dispatch to a clinical area it should be ensured that it is safe and clean. Please remember that fans and other equipment can themselves pose additional risk and should be risk assessed as with any other hazard;
- Encourage organisations to record any incidents related to the heat in the accident book. For patients and service users they should also be recorded as untoward

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.unison.org.uk/upload/sharepoint/Toweb/Temperature%20at%20Work%20Information%20Sheet%20Aug14%20update.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/public/weather/heat-health/#?tab=heatHealth>

incidents. This will enable you to capture more detailed information, which will help you and the organisation to review how you managed during the hot weather & what other measures you may need to consider for future years;

- Ask all wards and departments to ensure that they have a temperature gauge in place and take recordings during the day and record this so that you can monitor and where necessary the organisation can provide additional support;
- Particular attention should be given to those who are pregnant or breast feeding to ensure their safety and well being.

**Clinical Areas** – this includes any areas where patients are being seen or treated irrespective of its location:

- Where possible and appropriate windows and curtains should be drawn from the beginning of the day, this will help to keep the temperature of the environment down;
- When not in use and appropriate electrical equipment should be turned off;
- **Cooled water** should be available to **all patients & staff** in all clinical settings, this includes patient waiting areas such as outpatients, GP surgeries and Accident & Emergency;
- Additional fans and portable air conditioning units should be available and used when necessary;
- Organisations should also consider additional seating arrangements in these areas;
- Organisations should lift any restriction on drinks not being allowed to be consumed at work stations and staff should be encouraged to drink water frequently to maintain their hydration;
- Particular attention should be given to at risk patients to ensure that they are drinking adequate amounts. Whilst water is helpful it may also be necessary to consider additional hot drink rounds, as this may encourage particular patient groups to drink. Whilst caffeine is a natural diuretic, the amount of it in tea more so than coffee, when diluted with hot water should not impact on a patient's hydration;
- If delays occur in surgery consideration should be given to cannulating & establishing a drip for patients who are nil by mouth, in particular if they are waiting some time.

**Non Clinical Areas: -**

- These areas are often forgotten about but they are as equally important;
- Where possible and appropriate windows and curtains should be drawn from the beginning of the day, this will help to keep the temperature of the environment down;
- When not in use and appropriate electrical equipment should be turned off;
- Additional fans and portable air conditioning units should be available and used when necessary, this equipment should be risk assessed prior to use;
- Organisations should lift any restriction on drinks not being allowed to be consumed at work stations and staff should be encourage to drink water frequently to maintain their hydration;
- Particular attention should be given to extreme heat environments for example catering departments and boiler rooms. Organisations should ensure that they have reviewed all risk assessments in these environments.

**Employers & Managers:-**

- Staff should during this time be allowed to take more frequent short breaks;
- Restrictions on uniform policies should be lifted, for example staff should not have to wear tights or socks during hot weather if they choose. Where uniform is not required staff should be able to dress more comfortably and where appropriate organisations may wish to consider the additional use of theatre blues. This may be of particular use in departments where the temperature is consistently high;
- Where appropriate organisations should actively consider flexible working enabling staff to travel to and from work safely;
- Staff should be encouraged to drink water including in clinical settings – although sensitivity should be shown not to drink in front of patients who may be nil by mouth;
- Any incidents whether they involve staff or patients should be recorded in accident books and incident forms should also be completed.

**Staff** also have a responsibility to protect their own health, safety and well being:

- If anyone feels unwell (faint, dizzy, high pulse rate) they will need to rest and seek attention, the use of occupational health in these circumstances is important as most A&E departments will be over whelmed with patients. However clearly if someone does faint they will need to be treated appropriately including where & if appropriate A&E;
- It's vital that if you or a colleague become unwell you should ensure that you make your manager aware so that appropriate steps can be taken;
- Remember when travelling too and from work ensure you have a bottle of water with you;
- When taking breaks if you have access to outside areas its advisable to find some where in the shade to rest.

## Further information sources

### Health & Safety Information:

1. Detailed information on temperature can be found on UNISON's Health and Safety web site  
<https://www.unison.org.uk/upload/sharepoint/Toweb/Temperature%20at%20Work%20Information%20Sheet%20Aug14%20update.pdf>:
2. Information from the Trade Union Council can be found here  
<https://www.tuc.org.uk/workplace-issues/health-and-safety/temperature-work-heat-guide-safety-representatives>;
3. Information from the Health & Safety Executive can be found here  
<http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/index.htm>.

### Taking care of yourself during hot weather:

4. Information on taking care of yourself during hot weather conditions can be found at NHS Direct <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Summerhealth/Pages/Heatwave.aspx>;
5. Heat wave information and guidance in Wales can be found here  
<http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/863/page/68257>;
6. Heat wave information and guidance in Wales can be found here  
<http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/looking-after-yourself-in-very-hot-weather>;

7. The heat wave plan for England is located here  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/429384/Heatwave\\_Main\\_Plan\\_2015.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/429384/Heatwave_Main_Plan_2015.pdf);
8. General advise on well being during the heat wave can be found here  
<http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Summerhealth/Pages/Summerhealthhome.aspx>.

**Other sources of information:**

9. You can access up to date information and monitor information on the Met Office web site at [http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/uk/uk\\_forecast\\_weather.html](http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/weather/uk/uk_forecast_weather.html).