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In August, temperatures hit over 38C (101F) during a few weeks of heat wave in Spain. It all depends on the wind, if the wind comes from over the land then temperature will rise and this wind feels like you are standing before a hair dryer. Sea winds feel much more comfortable and cooler. If hot weather hits you, take steps to make sure it doesn't harm you or anyone you know.

Most of us welcome hot weather, but when it's too hot for too long there are health risks, especially for the very young, the elderly and the seriously ill. In particular, very hot weather can make heart and breathing problems worse.

Whilst most of us enjoy sunny weather, the extreme heat of a heat wave can be seriously damaging to the health, and can sometimes be fatal. This article provides information about who is at risk during a heat wave, and advice about what to do in case of a heat wave.

### **When heat becomes a problem**

An average temperature of 30C by day and 15C overnight would trigger a health alert (this figure varies slightly). These temperatures can have a significant effect on people's health if they last for at least two days and the night in between.

The Meteorological Office has a warning system that issues alerts if a heat wave is likely. Level one is the minimum alert and is in place from 1 June until 15 September (which is the period that heat wave alerts are likely to be raised).

- The minimum alert simply means that people should be aware of what to do if the alert level is raised.
- If a level two alert is issued, there is a high chance that a heat wave will occur within the next few days.
- The level three alert is when a heat wave is happening.
- The level four alert is when a heat wave is severe.

### **Why is a heat wave a problem?**

The main risks posed by a heat wave are:

- dehydration (not having enough water)
- overheating, which can make symptoms worse for people who already have problems with their heart or breathing
- heat exhaustion
- heatstroke

### **Who is most at risk?**

A heat wave can affect anyone, but the most vulnerable people in extreme heat are:

- older people, especially those over 75
- babies and young children
- people with a serious chronic condition, especially heart or breathing problems
- people with mobility problems, for example people with Parkinson's disease or who have had a stroke
- people with serious mental health problems
- people on certain medications, including those that affect sweating and temperature control
- people who misuse alcohol or drugs
- people who are physically active, for example labourers or those doing sports

### **Tips for coping**

The following advice applies to everybody when it comes to keeping cool and comfortable and reducing health risks:

- Shut windows and pull down the shades when it is hotter outside. If it's safe, open them for ventilation when it is cooler.
- Avoid the heat: stay out of the sun and don't go out between 11am and 3pm (the hottest part of the day) if you're vulnerable to the effects of heat.
- Keep rooms cool by using shades or reflective material outside the windows. If this isn't possible, use light-coloured curtains and keep them closed (metallic blinds and dark curtains can make the room hotter).
- Have cool baths or showers, and splash yourself with cool water.
- Drink cold drinks regularly, such as water and fruit juice. Avoid tea, coffee and alcohol.
- Stay tuned to the weather forecast on the radio or TV.
- Plan ahead to make sure you have enough supplies, such as food, water and any medications you need.
- Identify the coolest room in the house so you know where to go to keep cool.
- Wear loose, cool clothing and a hat if you go outdoors.
- Check up on friends, relatives and neighbours who may be less able to look after themselves.

### **How do I know if someone needs help?**

If someone feels unwell, get them somewhere cool to rest. Give them plenty of fluids to drink.

If symptoms such as breathlessness, chest pain, confusion, weakness, dizziness or cramps get worse or don't go away, seek immediate medical help and call 112 in Spain or 999 in the UK.