

Staying cool in a heatwave

Summer 2026



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Staying Cool

This advice is based on the recommendations of the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and the lived experience of residents in North Brixton in summer 2025 who took part in the Cooling5Ways project ([case study on the Lambeth Climate Partnership platform](#)).

There is more advice on the [Lambeth](#), [UKHSA](#) and [NHS](#) websites.



Thermometers

Residents found that knowing the temperature of their home was important, particularly if they were looking after a young child, someone elderly or someone with a health condition

Tips and tricks

- Know the temperature, don't guess it. Indoor temperatures can be well above outside temperatures, and rooms within the same home can be very different temperatures
- Your living area and bedroom are where you spend most of your time, so prioritise keeping track of the temperature in them
- You can buy basic room thermometers for £2 to £3 each online, and you really don't need anything expensive or complicated



What's too hot?

The NHS and UK Government don't say what temperature is too hot, as it varies between people, but they do give us some key trigger temperatures:

- When the outside **temperatures go above 24.5 °C**, we know it starts to make vulnerable people ill, so be aware that even at temperatures well below a heatwave, some vulnerable people are already being stressed by heat.
- The **recommended maximum room temperature for a cool area in a hospital or care home is 26 °C**, so that's a good guide for a home with vulnerable adults or children.

Heatwave Action in care homes and hospitals

- Monitor indoor temperatures four times a day
- Maximise external shading and night-time ventilation
- Ensure cool areas do not exceed 26°C
- Provide regular cool drinks



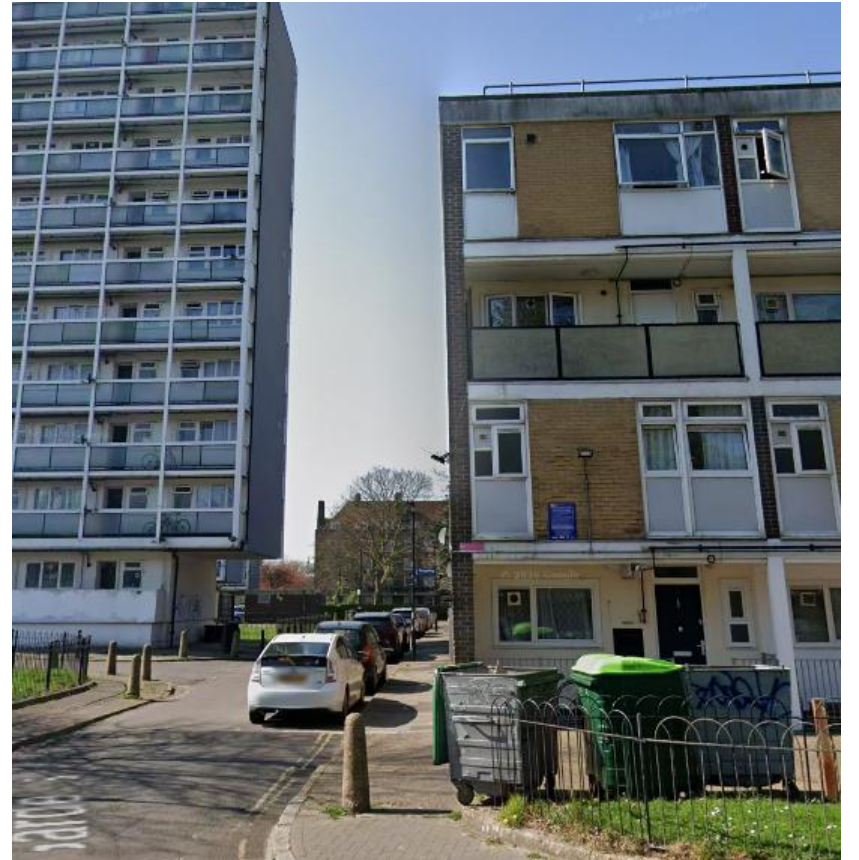
Water Bottles

Residents found that having a reusable water bottle was a very effective way to stay hydrated:

- It reminds you to drink
- It helps you keep track of how much you drink and what children or older people you are caring for drink
- Having water within reach is very useful for older people, so they don't have to walk to get to it and can sip it steadily throughout the day
- It's cheaper than buying bottled water when you are out travelling in hot weather

Ventilation and Shade

- The weather forecast gives you the air temperature outside, but the sun heats up your home through windows, walls, and the roof.
- This heat from the sun can build up inside , and indoor temperatures can be well above outdoor temperatures, **just like a greenhouse.**
- But you can reduce that heat by keeping the sun out during the hottest part of the day and making use of cool air at night and in the early morning.



Keeping the Sun Out: Using Shade

- Heating from the sun through windows is one of the main causes of overheating in homes and using shades can really help keep the heat out
- Shutting your windows will keep hot air out, but heat can come through the glass as sunlight and heat your rooms up
- Shading windows can keep the heat from the sun out of rooms.
- If you have curtains or blinds with a light-coloured lining the simplest way of doing that can be closing your curtains or blinds

If you don't have suitable curtains or blinds you can buy and fit temporary ones that reflect heat



<https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2023-12-05/stifling-suffocating-unliveable-life-in-a-overheating-home>

Temporary reflective blinds

- They cost around £20 per room and use fabric that is silver on one side to reflect the heat back out of your home.
- Last year in Brixton, many people found them very effective, particularly in children's bedrooms.
- Others found them a bit difficult to fit and didn't like how dark they made the room.

Tips and tricks

- Don't cover the whole window its about keeping heat out, not making it completely dark inside
- Don't try to cover all your windows; focus on the big ones that get the most sun
- Use the silver side towards the sun you want to send the heat back out, not absorb it in the blind



Temporary paper blinds

- They cost as little as £3 each and use self-adhesive tabs to fix to a window frame or glass
- They are available online and in shops like Ikea

Tips and tricks

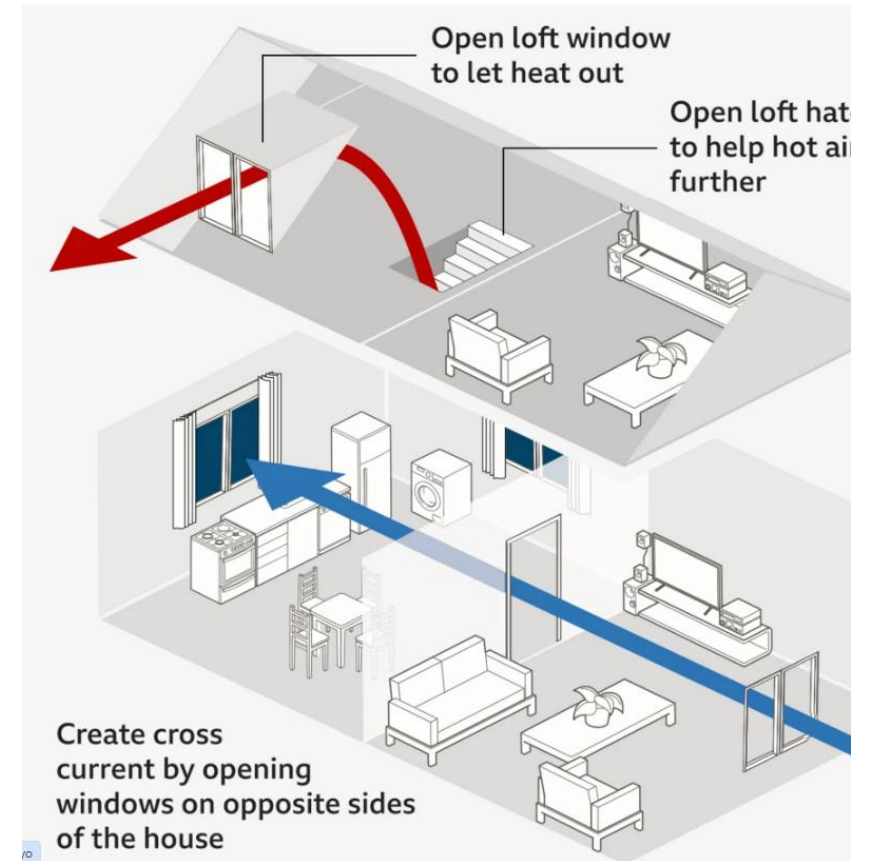
- Use white ones; you want to reflect the heat back out of the window
- Don't try to cover all your windows, focus on the big ones that get the most sun



Letting the heat out: Ventilation

Homes will heat up during the day we can slow it down, but we can't stop it without air conditioning

- However, outside air temperatures fall during the night giving us cool air outside which we can use to cool down our homes
- Opening doors and windows from late evening through to early morning can cool your home down a lot so you start the next day with a much cooler house



Using an electric fan

- Natural ventilation is more effective than fans as it brings in new cool air
- Fans can really help when there is no cooling breeze, and were the most popular piece of equipment for Residents last summer
- But do check your thermometer as **UKHSA recommends you don't use a fan if the room temperature is above 35°C**



Face the Breeze

- A fan works best if it's **pushing fresh cool air towards you**, so having it near a window or in a spot with good airflow may help
- Do remember that you may need to drink more to replace the water that the fan evaporates from your skin



The cost of an electric fan

- Many Lambeth residents are living on very low incomes. We estimate that at least 25% of Lambeth pensioners and nearly 40% of Lambeth children live in households experiencing poverty (low income), and **fear of the cost was a reason that some people were reluctant to use electric fans.**
- Running a standard tower-type fan constantly for 24 hours would cost around 35 pence (if you run it for 8 hours a day, the cost would be nearer 12 pence)
- For some people on very tight budgets, this will still be a problem, but it's less than the cost of a small bottle of water

Stay Safe with Electric Fans

Buy

Buy from a reputable supplier so you know its electrically safe

If you have children choose one that is child safe

Plug and place

Avoid using a multiple adapter you don't want to overload your socket

Place it somewhere where it will give a good breeze, but is safe

Cable

Make sure the cord isn't stretched across where people walk or causing a hazard on a work surface where it might knock something over.

Cool Mats

These cost between £10 and £20 each depending on size and type, and were very popular with elderly residents who put them in their beds and chairs

Tips and tricks

- They offer temporary relief rather than long-term cooling
- It's useful to have two if you have poor mobility, so you don't need to move them between rooms
- They do gradually warm up and need to be re-cooled in a cool room or fridge after prolonged use
- They are **not for use with babies or very young children**



Heat Illness

Heat illness can happen very quickly

- If you are in a very hot place, you can overheat and become dangerously ill very rapidly with heat stroke and/or dehydration.
- If you are exercising and dehydrated, this will make it even more likely.
- Drinking alcohol makes you more vulnerable no matter how fit and healthy you are#

Heat illness can also build slowly

- If you are exposed to unusually warm conditions over several days, particularly at night, the symptoms can come on more gradually. This can be a particular risk to vulnerable adults and children, and you don't need to have very high peak temperatures; it's about prolonged heat stress.

The more aware you are of the risks, the better protected you are

- Please look out for each other, friends, family, neighbours or strangers and look at the NHS website for how to spot heat illness and what to do if someone has heat illness.
- There is more advice on the [Lambeth](#), [UKHSA](#) and [NHS](#) websites.