

Dementia Active Heatwave Policy

For members, families, carers, care homes, staff, volunteers and transport arrangements

Policy owner	Dementia Active
Applies to	All Dementia Active groups, staff, volunteers, members, families, carers, care homes and transport arrangements
Review period	Annually before summer, and after any significant heatwave incident
Purpose	To reduce the risk of heat-related illness for Dementia Active members, particularly those who are more vulnerable due to age, dementia, reduced mobility, reduced ability to communicate discomfort, underlying health conditions, medication, dehydration risk, or living arrangements.

1. Policy statement

Dementia Active recognises that people living with dementia may be at increased risk during hot weather. Some members may not recognise that they are becoming too hot, may forget to drink, may be unable to explain how they feel, or may find it harder to regulate their activity and clothing.

During periods of hot weather or a Heat-Health Alert, Dementia Active will take a cautious and person-centred approach. The safety and wellbeing of members, staff and volunteers will come before attendance at group sessions.

Where appropriate, Dementia Active will encourage more vulnerable members to stay with loved ones during heatwave periods. Members who live alone may be safer attending a Dementia Active group where they can be observed, supported, kept in company, and prompted to drink regularly, provided the group environment is suitable and the member can travel safely.

2. Heatwave trigger points

This policy will be considered active when any of the following apply:

- A UKHSA/Met Office Heat-Health Alert is issued for the relevant area.
- A Met Office extreme heat warning is issued.
- Local temperatures are forecast to be unusually high.
- A Dementia Active centre is assessed as too warm or unsuitable for safe group delivery.
- Staff judge that heat, travel, ventilation, hydration or member vulnerability creates a foreseeable risk.

Dementia Active does not need to wait for a formal red or amber warning before taking precautionary action.

3. Members most likely to be at risk

Extra consideration should be given to members who:

- live alone;
- live in a care home;
- have advanced dementia or significant cognitive impairment;
- are unable to communicate thirst, discomfort, dizziness or feeling unwell;
- have poor mobility, poor balance, reduced core strength or fatigue;
- are unable to manage stairs safely;
- have heart, lung, kidney, diabetes or other long-term health conditions;
- take medication that may increase heat or dehydration risk;
- rely on transport that may become hot or delayed;
- need close personal support with drinking, toileting, mobility or eating.

4. Attendance guidance during heatwaves

4.1 Members who can stay with loved ones

Where a member is particularly vulnerable and has family, friends or loved ones available, Dementia Active will encourage them to stay with those loved ones during heatwave periods, especially on the hottest days.

This is because they may be safer in a familiar home environment where they can rest, avoid travel, remain cool, and receive one-to-one support.

4.2 Members who live alone

Members who live alone should not automatically be encouraged to stay at home during a heatwave.

Where the home environment may be isolated, poorly monitored or at risk of overheating, the member may be safer attending a Dementia Active group, provided the centre environment is suitable. Group attendance allows staff and volunteers to:

- monitor the member's wellbeing;
- prompt regular drinks;
- observe signs of heat-related illness;
- reduce isolation;
- ensure the member is not left unsupported during the hottest part of the day.

A judgement should be made case by case, considering the member's health, transport, home circumstances and the temperature of the group venue.

4.3 Members living in care homes

During a heatwave, Dementia Active will strongly encourage members living in care homes not to attend group sessions.

Care homes are expected to have their own heatwave procedures, staffing and monitoring arrangements. Travelling to and from group, spending time in a warm venue, and disruption to care routines may increase risk.

Where a care home still wishes a resident to attend, Dementia Active should ask the care home to confirm that attendance is safe and appropriate, including transport arrangements, hydration, medication considerations and the member's ability to cope in the group environment.

5. Venue-specific considerations

Dementia Active recognises that not all centres have the same level of cooling, ventilation or air conditioning.

The following venues require particular caution because they are not fully air conditioned:

- Banbury Centre
- Carterton Centre

During hot weather, these centres should be assessed before and during sessions. Staff should consider room temperature, ventilation, access to shade, availability of cool drinking water, member mobility, staffing levels and whether the session can be safely delivered.

As a practical benchmark, Dementia Active will strongly suggest that members who cannot manage a flight of stairs due to reduced core strength, stamina or mobility may not cope well in an area that is not air conditioned.

This benchmark is not intended to exclude members unfairly. It is a safety guide to help identify people who may be more vulnerable to heat stress, fatigue, dehydration or reduced physical resilience.

6. Actions before a heatwave

When hot weather is forecast, Dementia Active staff should:

- check UKHSA/Met Office heat-health information;
- identify members who may be more vulnerable;
- contact families, carers or care homes where appropriate;
- discuss whether attendance is advisable;
- remind members and carers to bring water, wear light clothing and avoid unnecessary exertion;
- check that venues have drinking water available;
- consider reducing session length, changing activities or cancelling sessions if needed;
- check transport arrangements, including whether vehicles may become too hot;
- ensure staff and volunteers know the signs of heat exhaustion and heatstroke.

7. Actions during group sessions

During hot weather, staff and volunteers should:

- encourage members to drink regularly, even if they do not ask for a drink;
- offer water frequently and record concerns where appropriate;
- avoid strenuous physical activity;
- use shaded or cooler areas where possible;
- keep curtains or blinds closed where this helps reduce heat;
- increase ventilation where safe and practical;
- avoid unnecessary outdoor time during the hottest part of the day;
- monitor members for changes in behaviour, confusion, agitation, tiredness, dizziness, headache, nausea, weakness, cramps, flushed skin, excessive sweating or lack of sweating;
- escalate concerns promptly to the duty lead, family, carer, care home, NHS 111 or 999 depending on severity.

8. Transport considerations

Transport should be reviewed during heatwave periods. Staff should consider:

- whether journeys are essential;
- whether the vehicle is cool enough before members board;
- whether water is available;
- whether delays are likely;
- whether a member may become distressed or overheated during travel;
- whether a shorter route or reduced passenger load is needed;
- whether attendance should be cancelled for individual members.

No member should be transported if staff believe the journey creates an unreasonable heat-related risk.

9. When sessions may be changed or cancelled

Dementia Active may adapt, shorten, relocate or cancel sessions during hot weather.

Reasons may include:

- unsafe room temperatures;
- lack of ventilation or cooling;
- high-risk members due to attend;
- insufficient staff or volunteers to monitor members safely;
- transport risk;
- care home advice;
- Met Office or UKHSA warnings;
- staff judgement that the session cannot be delivered safely.

Where sessions are cancelled or changed, staff should prioritise communication with members who live alone or who may be at greater risk of isolation.

10. Communication with families, carers and care homes

During heatwave periods, Dementia Active will communicate clearly and early with members, families, carers and care homes.

Communication should explain the reason for any attendance advice, changes to sessions or cancellations, and should make clear that safety and wellbeing are the priority.

Staff should record any significant attendance decisions, concerns raised by families or care homes, and any advice given.

11. Emergency response

If a member appears seriously unwell, staff should act immediately.

Call 999 if a member has symptoms such as collapse, loss of consciousness, severe confusion, seizure, very hot skin, rapid deterioration, or symptoms that suggest heatstroke.

For less severe but concerning symptoms, staff should contact the member's family, carer, care home, GP, NHS 111 or emergency services as appropriate.

The incident should be recorded according to Dementia Active's usual incident reporting procedure.

12. Staff and volunteer wellbeing

Staff and volunteers are also at risk during hot weather. Dementia Active will encourage regular drinks, rest breaks, suitable clothing, reduced exertion and early reporting of feeling unwell.

Staff should not be expected to work in unsafe heat conditions.

13. Review

This policy should be reviewed:

- before each summer season;
- after any heatwave-related incident;
- after any session cancellation due to heat;
- if UKHSA, Met Office, NHS or local authority guidance changes;
- if venue cooling, air conditioning or layout changes.

Guidance sources

This policy should be read alongside current UKHSA, Met Office, NHS and local authority heat-health guidance.