

03/07/2026

The Rt Hon James Murray MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

Dear Mr Murray MP,

I am writing to you as the sustainability lead with Doctors' Association UK (DAUK) following a survey we conducted of the lived experiences of UK healthcare professionals during the heatwave in the week commencing 22 June 2026.

In the same week as the Met Office modelled plausible scenarios of temperatures exceeding 45C in the UK within our lifetimes, June record temperatures were repeatedly broken and the London Ambulance Service responded to a record number of life-threatening emergencies, the highest in its history. (1,2)

From the UKHSA's Health Effects of Climate Change report, we know we can expect tens of thousands of deaths annually by 2050 under current emissions trajectories.(3)

While we await the figures of excess deaths during June's heatwave, we know from first-hand experiences that staff and patients have suffered unbearable conditions, and patient safety was critically compromised. We have collated some of these accounts to present the direct risks to patient safety that were experienced.

A total of 1,111 NHS staff of all professions responded to our rapid, snapshot survey:

- 94.1% reported no, or only partially working air conditioning in their main clinical area. Fewer than 5% reported air conditioning throughout their area.
- 83.3% described their workplace as very hot or dangerously hot, with 42% describing it as dangerously hot.
- 68.3% felt heat had affected patient care and safety
- 86.9% said they or their colleagues had felt unwell because of the heat
- 89.8% would support a legal maximum workplace temperature for healthcare facilities

- There were 367 exact temperature reports, ranging from 19-45C. 86.9% of reports were at least 30C. It is worth noting the UKHSA recommends ward temperatures no higher than 26-28C.(4,5)

Free text responses report patients developing dehydration, heat stroke, staff members collapsing, difficulty in concentrating while making complex decisions, working conditions being described as 'horrendous and unbearable for both patients and staff'.

Some examples of experiences include:

- "A nurse collapsed on the ward, everyone is working with wet pads or gloves filled with water on their necks, a colleague had to shower at midday and all the lights on some wards have been turned off to keep it cool."
- "Burning hot while having to make vital decisions about the care of very vulnerable and clinically unstable patients. Doing CPR in a poorly ventilated room was almost impossible and we all had to regularly switch out."
- "Temperatures were so high that patients were getting temperatures, families were complaining and staff were calling in sick or had headaches, felt sick and dizzy... Staff resorted to wetting pillow cases and putting them on patients and themselves to cool down."
- "I can no longer care for patients safely. Septic patients are left in corridors with ambient temperatures of 33 degrees. Two members of staff went home sick today."
- "The building is unbearably hot even when there isn't a heatwave due to poor ventilation. With the heatwave, it's been hard to breathe and it makes me feel tired... I also feel worried for patients who are more frail and less able to tolerate the heat coming into the building as it is stiflingly hot for them. We should have a safe maximum working temperature in the UK and employers should be obligated to have adequate cooling measures on site such as air conditioning."
- "My colleague who is 8 months pregnant was expected to work on a ward with no air conditioning where it was so hot I felt unwell, never mind her. We were not provided with any air conditioning units or fans unless staff brought them in themselves. The only measures management put in place was to tell us to take a 5 minute break every hour, but there was nowhere to go in that 5 minutes to cool down. I left every day feeling overheated, had a headache and nausea. All of my patients on the COTE ward were flat, some delirious due to

being kept on a ward with no AC. I heard from colleagues across the hospital treating patients from heat exhaustion due to lack of AC.”

- "Patients are too hot to engage with [occupational and physical] therapy so no progress is made towards discharge and patients are staying in hospital longer."
- "Old hospital heating still on full blast as unable to turn old radiators down."
- "We have patients brought in due to severe heat stroke who are not able to be treated appropriately because there is nowhere cool to put them."

A comprehensive list of the key responses can be found in Appendix A, and the full list of anonymised qualitative feedback can be found in Appendix B.

To be clear, we believe the suffering experienced by staff and patients in this heatwave was entirely predictable and avoidable had there been effective climate adaptation and mitigation. This is preventable from happening again.

This heatwave was not exceptional, it was not unique, and it is not the 'new normal'. It is the latest baseline of extreme weather events that we will experience and that we are simply not prepared for.

Successive Governments have failed to invest in NHS infrastructure and have not treated climate change as the threat to public safety that it is. We urge this Government to not be the latest to allow such harms to come to patients again.

We urgently recommend:

1. A legal maximum safe working temperature for hospitals and GP surgeries, in line with the UKHSA's recommendations for safe working temperatures for inpatient settings.
2. Urgent investment in cooling mechanisms, such as air conditioning, to provide the ability to all healthcare settings to reduce air temperatures to safer working temperatures.
3. Urgent investment in insulation and energy efficiency, to provide more consistent temperatures year-round.
4. Encourage employers to treat high air temperatures as significant health risks to staff and provide appropriate rest, cooling and hydration facilities.

Legislated maximum working temperatures are common across the world, including in countries such as Belgium, Brazil, Qatar and South Africa.⁽⁶⁾ Introducing similar, appropriate legislation to keep healthcare workers, patients and workers across all industries safe is now a necessity, given the regularity and intensity of heatwaves we continue to experience due to climate change.

Additionally, we urge the Government to take an accelerated programme of high impact climate crisis education and action, treating climate change as the number one threat to public health:

1. Deliver an urgent, public health campaign on the relationship between climate change and health.
2. Accelerate the UK's decarbonisation targets and include a target of ensuring every health facility has solar energy installations, such as solar car parks, to mitigate climate change and offset increased energy requirements and costs due to air conditioning.
3. Accelerate the restoration of nature to rapidly expand greenspaces around healthcare facilities to mitigate against heatwaves and other extreme weather events.

As healthcare professionals, we will never abandon our patients and urge you not to do the same by taking rapid, proactive measures to keep patients and staff safe in heatwaves.

We encourage you to take the time to read the attached stories, which we feel paint a comprehensive picture of the challenges of working in the NHS during heatwaves. You can be the Government to prevent these stories being repeated. A failure to act will cost even more lives. We, and others in the healthcare community, are ready to support you to take bold action to keep us all safe and we welcome a meeting to discuss these challenges and their solutions further.

Yours sincerely



Dr Matthew Lee MBBCh BSc MSc
Sustainability lead for Doctors' Association UK (DAUK)

References:

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- 3) UK Health Security Agency. *Health Effects of Climate Change (HECC) in the UK: 2023 report. Chapter 2: temperature effects on mortality in a changing climate* [Internet]. London: UK Health Security Agency; 2023 [cited 2026 Jun 29]. Available from: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/659ff712e96df5000df844bf/HECC-report-2023-chapter-2-temperature.pdf>
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- 5) Brooks K, Landeg O, Kovats S, Sewell M, OConnell E. Heatwaves, hospitals and health system resilience in England: a qualitative assessment of frontline perspectives from the hot summer of 2019. *BMJ Open*. 2023 Mar 6;13(3):e068298. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2022-068298. PMID: 36878654; PMCID: PMC9990610.
- 6) International Labour Organization. Ensuring safety and health at work in a changing climate. Geneva: International Labour Office; 2024. Available from: https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/2024-07/ILO_SafeDay24_Report_r11.pdf