

Is it too hot to work? Temperature in the workplace

Unfortunately there is no maximum temperature for workers although the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) regulations state the temperature inside workplace buildings must be 'reasonable'.

It is usually accepted that people work best at a temperature between 16C and 24C, although this can vary depending on the kind of work being done. Strenuous work is better performed at a slightly lower temperature than office work. If the temperature varies too much from this then it can become a health and safety issue.

In very hot conditions the bodies blood temperature rises. If the blood temperature rises above 39C there is a risk of heat stroke or collapse.

Measures that should be considered include:

* Relaxing the dress code
* Redesigning the work area: often simply moving people away from windows
* Install fans or natural ventilation: providing fans or winds that open can also help workers feel cooler, however both these become less effective at higher temperatures. Portable air cooling cabinets are also available, which are more effective.
* Allowing staff to be more flexible in their working arrangements: often staff travel to work on overcrowded trains or buses. Allowing them flexibility to finish either earlier or later can help, as can allowing them more frequent rest breaks.
* Outdoor workers should take particular cate – skin cancer and dehydration risk can be minimised through taking precautions

Contact the branch office or your local UNISON health and safety rep if you have any issues. Maybe you would consider becoming a rep?

the TUC recommends that employers work with their health and safety union reps to work out the most appropriate and effective measures that would best protect their workers in these conditions.

[David Robinson](https://www.thompsonstradeunion.law/about/our-people/personal-injury-solicitors/david-robinson) of Thompsons Solicitors commented: “This advice is about ensuring employers approach their management health and safety dynamically and flexibly. Working in high temperatures can cause significant permanent damage to employees’ health and it is fundamentally important they have measures in place to prevent harm. Employers should be proactive in their planning and should not wait until a heatwave is upon the nation”.

Visit the [TUC website](https://www.tuc.org.uk/news/heatwave-make-sure-staff-working-outside-have-enough-water-and-breaks-says-tuc) and [Acas website](http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=6554) to read the advice in full.

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In offices or similar environments, the temperature in workplaces must be reasonable.  
There’s no law for maximum working temperature, or when it’s too hot to work.   
Employers must stick to health and safety at work law, including:

* keeping the temperature at a comfortable level, sometimes known as thermal comfort
* providing clean and fresh air

There are [six basic factors](http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/thermal/factors.htm) which usually cause discomfort. Employees should talk to their employer if the workplace temperature isn’t comfortable.  
Read about [what you can do to feel more comfortable](http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/thermal/workers.htm).

If your job involves extreme temperatures

In some workplaces extreme temperatures are not seasonal but are created by the work, like in some manufacturing processes. These temperatures can lead to serious health effects if not managed effectively.

You should seek specific [advice on temperature](http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/index.htm) if you are working in very high or low temperatures, for example on [heat stress](http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/heatstress/index.htm), [dehydration](http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/dehydration.htm) or [cold stress](http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/coldstress.htm)

The six basic factors

The most commonly used indicator of thermal comfort is air temperature – it is easy to use and most people can relate to it. However, air temperature alone is not a valid or accurate indicator of thermal comfort or thermal stress. It should always be considered in relation to other environmental and personal factors.

The six factors affecting thermal comfort are both environmental and personal. These factors may be independent of each other, but together contribute to an employee’s thermal comfort.

Environmental factors:

* [Air temperature](http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/thermal/factors.htm#airtemp)
* [Radiant temperature](http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/thermal/factors.htm#radiant)
* [Air velocity](http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/thermal/factors.htm#velocity)
* [Humidity](http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/thermal/factors.htm#humidity)

Personal factors:

* [Clothing Insulation](http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/thermal/factors.htm#clothing)
* [Metabolic heat](http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/thermal/factors.htm#metabolic)

Employee's guide - temperature

This section outlines what you can do if you think there is a problem with [thermal comfort](http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/thermal/index.htm), [heat stress](http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/heatstress/index.htm), or [cold stress](http://www.hse.gov.uk/temperature/coldstress.htm) in your workplace. It is important for you to report these problems to your management, union or other workplace representative. You may have to work with your management and fellow employees to get permission to take some of the steps below, but by working together it is more likely that suitable, long-term solutions can be found.

What can you do?

There are a number of things that you can do to improve thermal comfort in your workplace:

* add or remove layers of clothing depending on how hot or cold you are
* use a desk or pedestal fan to increase air movement
* use window blinds (if available) to cut down on the heating effects of the sun
* in warm situations, drink plenty of water (avoid caffeinated or carbonated drinks)
* if possible, work away from direct sunlight or sources of radiant heat
* take regular breaks to cool down in warm situations and heat up in cold situations
* raise the issue with your managers or, if you can, with your union or other workplace representatives

Although any of the actions outlined above may go some way to alleviating your thermal discomfort, there are also a number of things that your manager or employer could do to help further.  
Talk to your manager, supervisor, union representative or employee representative about:

* where possible ensuring windows that open, fans are provided to promote local cooling and radiators can be switched off or air conditioning units are maintained
* introducing work systems to limit exposure, such as flexible hours or early/late starts to help avoid the worst effects of working in high temperatures
* relaxing formal dress codes
* insulating hot plant or pipes
* moving workstations away from hot plant or out of direct sunlight
* including assessments of thermal risk as part of workplace risk assessments

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