Millennium Farm Trust

GN19 Heatwave Policy and Action Plan V02

Next review date Feb 2028

Version Control

Version number	Date of changes	Who	Review summary
01	July 2022	T Freathy	Policy drafted.
01	April 2024	T Freathy	Scheduled review. No changes
02	June 2026	T Freathy	Addition of AC revised door/window opening Revised mitigation actions Addition of Met Office trigger

This policy supplements and is additional to GN18 Adverse Weather Policy. It is drafted in response to the National Heatwave Plan published by the UK Health Protection Agency and is supported by the UK Government's guidance for supporting vulnerable people during a heatwave for health and social care professionals.

Heatwaves can prove fatal and we need to manage the risks to those who attend the farm.

Who is most at risk

- The elderly (some of our farm helpers are over 70),
- those with chronic health conditions, including heart conditions, diabetes, respiratory or renal insufficiency, Parkinson's disease, or severe mental illness. Medications that potentially affect renal function, sweating, thermoregulation, or electrolyte balance can make this group more vulnerable to the effects of heat (includes some of our farm helpers).
- Those with an inability to adapt behaviour to keep cool: having Alzheimer's, a physical disability, a learning disability. (Includes a good number of farm helpers).
- environmental factors and overexposure: activities or jobs that are in hot places or outdoors and include high levels of physical exertion (includes all our farm helpers)

The hot weather is lovely to do nothing in, but not so great for working in. We must all take the heat seriously and ensure our farm helpers are safe and as comfortable as possible during the next couple of weeks.

The impact of heat on health

When the ambient temperature is higher than skin temperature, the only effective heat-loss mechanism is sweating. Therefore, any factor that reduces the effectiveness of sweating such as dehydration, lack of breeze, tight-fitting clothes or certain medications can cause the body to overheat. Additionally, thermoregulation, which is controlled by the hypothalamus, can be impaired in the elderly and the chronically ill, and potentially in those taking certain medications, rendering the body more vulnerable to overheating.

The main causes of illness and death during a heatwave are respiratory and cardiovascular diseases. Additionally, there are specific heat-related illnesses including:

- heat cramps – caused by dehydration and loss of electrolytes, often following exercise
- heat rash – small, red, itchy papules
- heat oedema – mainly in the ankles, due to vasodilatation and retention of fluid
- heat syncope – dizziness and fainting, due to dehydration, vasodilatation, cardiovascular disease and certain medications
- heat exhaustion – is more common. It occurs because of water or sodium depletion, with non-specific features of malaise, vomiting and circulatory collapse, and is present when the body temperature is between 37°C and 40°C – left untreated, heat exhaustion may evolve into heatstroke
- heatstroke – can become a point of no return whereby the body's thermoregulation mechanism fails – this leads to a medical emergency, with symptoms of:
    - confusion
    - disorientation
    - convulsions
    - unconsciousness
    - hot dry skin, and
    - core body temperature exceeding 40°C for between 45 minutes and 8 hours, which can result in cell death, organ failure, brain damage or death – heatstroke can be either classical or exertional (for example, in athletes)

How we are managing the risks on the farm

We will keep out of the heat as much as possible by:

1. HQ receives no direct sunlight through the windows (thanks to our new veg shed veranda and it is insulated. HQ is air conditioned and is therefore a cool space. We will keep HQ cool by keeping the doors closed and ensuring the AC is set to a suitable temperature.
2. Working as much as possible in our shaded areas in the Sensory Garden, outside kitchen and on the north side of our outbuildings in the yard.
3. Where tasks need to be completed in full sun, these will be taken slowly to minimise exhaustion and regular, shaded breaks with drinks will be taken.
4. Break times in HQ may be extended to keep out of the hottest part of the day if staff feel that would be helpful and would not upset farm helpers who like a routine.
5. Everyone is advised to wear hats, sunscreen, thin scarves, and light clothing.

6. Adding additional water breaks every 45 minutes when out on the farm. Farm helpers may not recognise thirst or may simply not choose to drink. Staff and volunteers will model drinking behaviour. Introduce “everyone have three mouthfuls” routine at water breaks.

7. Everyone is encouraged to take a water bottle with them on the farm. This runs contrary to our usual policy that food and drink should not be consumed on the farm whilst working, but the risks posed by dehydration outweigh the small risk of contamination by zoonoses. Water bottles should not be taken into animal pens.

8. Dynamic activity and that which requires heavy protective clothing will be restricted. The following activity will be suspended during the heat wave:

    - Contract work will not be undertaken during the heat wave.
    - Strimming
    - Digging
    - Heavy wheelbarrow work
    - Fencing
    - Long walks

9. We will engage in formal welfare checks with High-Risk individuals by checking in with them throughout the day.
    - Farm helpers over 65years
    - Anyone with a heart condition
    - Diabetes
    - Respiratory conditions
    - Epilepsy
    - Those taking medication known to affect hydration

    Formal welfare checks will be recorded on LearnTrek:

10. The biggest residual risk, once all the above is enacted, is not the temperature itself but enthusiastic farm helpers / staff carrying on regardless when they are becoming dehydrated or overheated. That's where active observation by staff will make the biggest difference.

We will be alert

During periods of extreme heat, staff will proactively monitor fluid intake and signs of heat-related illness amongst farm helpers, recognising that some individuals may be unable to identify or communicate symptoms of dehydration or overheating.

As well as the specific symptoms of heat exhaustion and heatstroke, we will watch out for signs that could be attributed to other causes, such as:

- difficulty sleeping, drowsiness, faintness, and changes in behaviour
- increased body temperature (changes in skin tone, excessive sweating)
- difficulty breathing and increased heart rate
- dehydration, nausea, or vomiting
- worsening of existing health problems, especially of heart or respiratory system

We will use the morning staff briefing to remind staff about their additional responsibilities during the heatwave:

- What is the forecast temperature
- Planned activity changes / shade / cool jobs
- Who is particularly vulnerable
- Everyone drinks three mouthfuls every 45mins
- Water bottles allowed on the farm. (not in animal pens/cages)- Use the outside kitchen as a water station.
- Reminder of signs of heat exhaustion.
- Any particular livestock concerns that require attention. Eg check water more frequently. Increase fly activity, sun burn.

What farm helpers must do

Farm helpers and their home support networks are responsible for assessing their own individual risks. An individual's particular or clinical risk factor may mean it is better for them to stay at home rather than attend the farm.

When attending the farm during a heat wave, farm helpers are strongly encouraged to:

1. Bring a sun hat (these will be provided if they are forgotten).
2. Wear sunscreen (this will be provided if it is forgotten.) Please advise us if someone has a particular issue with wearing or putting on sunscreen.
3. Wear loose fitting clothing. Long sleeves are useful if skin is fair. Shoulders should always be covered.
4. Appropriate foot wear. Steel toe capped trainers are the best for summer. Stout shoes are preferable over wellington boots, even if they are not steel toed (activities may have be limited).
5. Shorts can be worn and should be between knee and mid thigh in length. (Long trousers could be kept at the farm for specific tasks eg strimming).
6. Bring a water bottle to take with you onto the farm whilst working.

In an emergency

Our usual health and Safety policy applies.

If we suspect a heat stroke, we will dial 999.

Whilst waiting for the ambulance we will:

1. Take the person's temperature.
2. If possible, move them somewhere cooler.
3. Cool them down as quickly as possible by giving them a cool shower, sprinkling them with water or wrapping them in a damp sheet, and using a fan to create an air current.
4. Encourage them to drink fluids if they are conscious.
5. We will not give aspirin or paracetamol.

Annex A – Heatwave Warning Levels and Operational Response

Introduction

Depden Care Farm operates throughout the year in a wide range of weather conditions. Staff continually assess weather-related risks and adapt activities, locations and working practices to ensure the safety and wellbeing of farm helpers, staff, volunteers and visitors.

Many of the control measures set out within GN19 Heatwave Policy and Action Plan are therefore part of normal good practice and may be implemented at any time when staff consider them necessary.

However, when the UK Met Office issues severe weather warnings for extreme heat, additional and more structured measures may be required. This annex sets out the actions that will normally be taken in response to Yellow, Amber and Red Heat Health Alerts affecting the local area.

The Director retains discretion to implement additional controls, shorten activities, or close the farm where circumstances indicate this is necessary to protect health and safety.

Yellow Heat Health Alert – Be Aware

A Yellow Alert indicates that hot weather may begin to affect vulnerable individuals and that additional vigilance is required.

The farm will remain open and operate largely as normal, however the following measures will normally be implemented:

- Staff briefed daily on forecast conditions.
- Increased monitoring of vulnerable farm helpers and staff.
- Water bottles actively encouraged and checked throughout the day.
- Additional drinking opportunities incorporated into the daily routine.
- Hats and sunscreen strongly encouraged.
- Greater use of shaded work areas and covered spaces.
- Regular breaks taken in HQ or other shaded locations.
- Strenuous activities reviewed and reduced where appropriate.
- Animal welfare checks increased, particularly water supplies and shaded areas.
- Home carers and support providers reminded of the need for appropriate clothing, hats, sunscreen and hydration.

Amber Heat Health Alert – Take Action

An Amber Alert indicates that significant impacts on health are likely, particularly amongst vulnerable people.

The farm will remain open where risks can be adequately controlled, however enhanced measures will normally be implemented:

- All Yellow Alert measures.
- Programme adapted to maximise indoor and shaded activities.
- Physical tasks significantly reduced, shortened or postponed.
- No contract work undertaken.

- Use of air-conditioned HQ increased throughout the day.
- Breaks extended where necessary.
- Formal welfare checks undertaken for identified high-risk individuals.
- Staff actively monitor fluid intake rather than relying on individuals requesting drinks.
- Outdoor activities concentrated in the cooler parts of the day wherever practicable.
- Additional cooling measures deployed, including fans, cool water sprays, damp towels or other suitable methods.
- Transport arrangements reviewed to minimise waiting times in direct sunlight.
- The Director to review conditions daily and determine whether continued operation remains safe.

Red Heat Health Alert – Emergency Response

A Red Alert indicates exceptional heat with a high risk of serious illness or death, including amongst healthy individuals.

When a Red Heat Health Alert is issued for the local area:

- The farm will normally close to farm helpers.
- Home carers, families, commissioners and transport providers will be informed as soon as practicable.
- Staff may be required to attend to undertake essential animal welfare and site management duties, subject to safe systems of work.
- Livestock care activities will be limited to those essential for animal welfare.
- The Director will determine when it is safe for normal operations to resume.

In exceptional circumstances, the Director may determine that limited activities can continue where risks can be demonstrably controlled, but closure will be the default position.