# Heatwave and wildfires expose gaps in London’s protection for people sleeping rough



A series of grass fires ripped across Wanstead Flats this week as London baked in a heatwave that pushed temperatures towards the mid‑30s Celsius and prompted an amber heat‑health alert, forcing firefighters into prolonged action and prompting warnings from the London Ambulance Service about pressures on emergency responders. According to the Evening Standard’s reporting, the scale of the blazes and the wider heat have also begun to strain transport and public‑service capacity across the capital.

Speaking to the Evening Standard, James Lally, director of pan and central London and street homeless services at the charity St Mungo’s, warned that people sleeping rough are acutely exposed during such spells. “On the streets, it can be difficult to access water, sunscreen, and places to shelter from the sun, meaning that those experiencing homelessness have a particularly high risk of developing life‑threatening heat‑related illnesses such as heat exhaustion, dehydration, or heat stroke,” he said. St Mungo’s said it has boosted outreach shifts and urged members of the public to offer water or suncream to people they find sleeping rough.

Public‑health guidance reinforces those concerns. Government advice from the UK Health Security Agency explains that people sleeping rough are at heightened risk because of prolonged outdoor exposure, underlying health conditions, medication side‑effects and social exclusion that reduce the ability to take protective actions. The guidance lists direct harms such as dehydration, heat cramps, heat exhaustion and potentially fatal heatstroke, and also warns that hot weather can exacerbate chronic heart, lung and kidney disease. The NHS sets out the symptoms to watch for and simple first‑aid steps — moving someone to a cool place, giving cool drinks, cooling the skin with wet cloths — while emphasising that heatstroke is a medical emergency requiring urgent help.

Frontline charities and sector guidance set out practical measures that can reduce harm. Homeless Link’s case studies and guidance describe how outreach teams and local partnerships typically respond: distributing water, sports drinks, suncream and hats; producing maps of cool spaces and water refills; and using libraries, day centres or temporary cooling hubs as relief points. They also underline the importance of staff training to spot heat‑related illness and the logistics needed — refrigeration for cold drinks, transport and coordinated multi‑agency planning — so that support can be scaled up quickly when alerts are issued.

Charities working with young and rough‑sleeping people offer straightforward actions members of the public can take immediately. Centrepoint recommends donating sun hats, suncream and lightweight clothing, freezing water bottles to give longer‑lasting cooling, and signposting people to local day‑centres and libraries; another sector guide urges people to map water points and encourage councils to activate agreed emergency protocols to open cool spaces and offer temporary shelter. The Big Issue and other outreach groups advise contacting local frontline services or using referral tools such as Streetlink if someone appears to be in danger.

If you encounter a person showing signs of heat exhaustion or heatstroke, follow NHS guidance: get them out of direct sunlight, loosen tight clothing, offer cool fluids if they are conscious and able to drink, and apply cooling measures such as wet cloths. Call emergency services immediately if someone is confused, has a temperature over 40°C, is fainting, or is not sweating despite high temperature — all red flags for heatstroke. Where possible, alert local outreach teams so they can follow up and offer longer‑term support or accommodation.

The combination of wildfires and extreme temperatures underlines that heatwaves are not merely an environmental inconvenience but a public‑health challenge that magnifies social vulnerability. Sector bodies stress that the most effective protection comes from pre‑emptive, coordinated action: early activation of heat‑health plans, visible cooling hubs, boosted outreach and public awareness so that people at greatest risk are located, sheltered and treated before minor symptoms escalate into medical emergencies. In the absence of those systems, charities say, individual acts — offering water, suncream or a call to local support services — can still save lives.

### 📌 Reference Map:

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/wanstead-flats-fire-heatwave-weather-met-office-b1242601.html), [[2]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/wanstead-flats-fire-heatwave-weather-met-office-b1242601.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/wanstead-flats-fire-heatwave-weather-met-office-b1242601.html), [[2]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/wanstead-flats-fire-heatwave-weather-met-office-b1242601.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/supporting-vulnerable-people-before-and-during-hot-weather-people-experiencing-homelessness-and-sleeping-rough), [[5]](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/heat-exhaustion-heatstroke/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/service-responses-to-hot-weather/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[5]](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/heat-exhaustion-heatstroke/), [[7]](https://www.bigissue.com/news/housing/how-can-i-help-homeless-people-during-a-uk-heatwave/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[4]](https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/service-responses-to-hot-weather/), [[6]](https://centrepoint.org.uk/news/how-help-homeless-people-hot-weather), [[2]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/wanstead-flats-fire-heatwave-weather-met-office-b1242601.html)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/wanstead-flats-fire-heatwave-weather-met-office-b1242601.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/wanstead-flats-fire-heatwave-weather-met-office-b1242601.html> - Article reports wildfires at Wanstead Flats amid a London heatwave, noting temperatures around 34°C and an amber heat-health alert. It quotes James Lally of St Mungo’s warning that people sleeping rough face difficulty accessing water, sun protection and shade, increasing their risk of dehydration, heat exhaustion and heatstroke. The piece describes firefighters’ response and wider public warnings from the London Ambulance Service. St Mungo’s says it has boosted outreach shifts and urges members of the public to offer water or sun cream to rough sleepers. It links heat risks to strain on transport and emergency services.
3. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/supporting-vulnerable-people-before-and-during-hot-weather-people-experiencing-homelessness-and-sleeping-rough> - GOV.UK guidance from the UK Health Security Agency explains why people sleeping rough are vulnerable during hot weather. It lists increased exposure to heat, underlying health conditions, medication effects and social exclusion that reduce ability to take preventative actions. The guidance identifies direct heat impacts such as dehydration, heat cramps, heat exhaustion and potentially fatal heatstroke, and indirect harms like worsening heart, lung and kidney conditions. Recommended actions include planning, signing up to Heat‑Health Alerts, providing cool spaces, ensuring access to drinkable water, distributing sun cream and hats, and offering temporary accommodation for those most at risk during heat events.
4. <https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/service-responses-to-hot-weather/> - Homeless Link provides case studies and guidance showing how services respond to extreme heat to protect people sleeping rough. It details H‑SWEP and local activations where outreach teams distribute water, sports drinks, sun cream, hats and light clothing, and produce maps of cool spaces and drinkable water points. Libraries and day centres are used as cooling hubs, alongside welfare checks, targeted outreach and offers of temporary accommodation for those most vulnerable. The organisation stresses staff training to spot heat‑related illness, logistical needs like refrigeration and transport, and the importance of coordinated multiagency planning before and during heat alerts and communication.
5. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/heat-exhaustion-heatstroke/> - The NHS explains heat exhaustion and heatstroke, outlining symptoms including dizziness, headache, excessive sweating, cramps, nausea, rapid heartbeat and high temperature; heatstroke is a medical emergency. It advises moving the person to a cool place, removing unnecessary clothing, giving cool water or rehydration fluids and cooling the skin with wet cloths while seeking urgent help if symptoms persist. To prevent heat illness the NHS recommends drinking more water, avoiding sun during peak hours, wearing light loose clothing and reducing physical exertion. It warns that older people, young children and those with long‑term conditions or prolonged outdoor exposure are at risk.
6. <https://centrepoint.org.uk/news/how-help-homeless-people-hot-weather> - Centrepoint’s advisory explains how hot weather can be life‑threatening for people who are homeless and offers practical steps public can take. It recommends donating umbrellas, sun hats and sun cream, and freezing water bottles to provide prolonged cooling and hydration. The guidance suggests supplying water‑rich food like fruit, giving lightweight clothing and encouraging use of local cool spaces such as libraries or day centres. Centrepoint highlights that tents and vehicles can become dangerously hot and that outreach and signposting to services are key. The page urges people to contact local support services or helplines if they see someone at risk.
7. <https://www.bigissue.com/news/housing/how-can-i-help-homeless-people-during-a-uk-heatwave/> - The Big Issue article explains how heatwaves endanger people sleeping rough, stressing risks like dehydration, sunburn and heatstroke and urging practical support. It outlines signs of heat exhaustion from the NHS and advises cooling, hydration and emergency calls for severe symptoms. The feature recommends donating sun cream, hats and frozen water bottles, mapping water refill points and encouraging councils to activate Severe Weather Emergency Protocols (SWEP) to open cooling spaces. Vendors and those working outdoors are highlighted as at‑risk groups. Readers are told to contact local frontline services or Streetlink if they encounter someone in need during extreme heat events.