

PPE and workplace temperature

Personal protective equipment (PPE) reduces the body's ability to evaporate sweat. If the PPE is awkward to wear, or heavy, it may contribute to an increase in body heat.

Wearing PPE in warm/hot temperatures with high work rates may increase the risk of heat stress.

How to keep workers safe wearing PPE

Encourage workers to remove PPE immediately after it is needed. This will prevent any heat retained in their clothing from continuing to heat them. Where necessary, they should allow it to dry out, or replace it, before using PPE again.

PPE may prevent workers removing clothing in case it exposes them to the hazard it is protecting them from.

Where PPE is required it can cause heat stress due to its weight and the fact that it prevents sweat evaporating from the skin. In these situations, employers should:

- allow slower work rates
- rotate staff out of this environment on a more frequent basis
- allow longer recovery times
- provide facilities for PPE to be dried so it can be worn again
- consider scheduling work to cooler times of the day
- review your risk assessment to see if automated or alternative systems of work can be introduced
- re-evaluate your equipment as newer PPE may be lighter and provide improved levels of protection and operator comfort

Make sure people continue to wear PPE correctly despite workplace temperatures. For example, they should not endanger themselves by undoing fasteners to increase air movement into clothing.

People can sometimes wear too much PPE so you should always look at the reasons for using it. For example:

- Can your workers wear less PPE and still have the protection they require or may other controls reduce or eliminate the need for it?
- Can the task be automated or can you adopt additional or more effective safeguards?
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Our PPE at work pages provide further advice, including selecting the most appropriate equipment for your workplace.

Very high or low workplace temperatures

We have specific advice for your workplace if you are working in very high or low temperatures, for example on heat stress, dehydration or cold stress.

If your workers are complaining or reporting illnesses that may be caused by temperatures in your workplace, review the situation and, if necessary, put in place controls to manage the risks. You may need to:

- monitor how workplace temperatures are affecting workers as part of your risk management
- put health surveillance or medical screening in place for workers who are pregnant, have illnesses or disabilities, or are taking certain medication
- review working habits and current practices and (where necessary) change these to control the risks

How workers can keep temperatures comfortable (from the HSE).

You may have to work with your employer and other workers to get permission to take some of the steps below. By working together you will be more likely to find suitable, long-term solutions.

What you can do as a worker

Here are some things you can do to make your workplace temperature more comfortable:

- 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 to reduce the heating effects of the sun
 - If you are too warm drink plenty of water (avoid caffeinated or carbonated drinks)
 - If possible, work away from direct sunlight or sources of heat, such as machinery
 - Take regular breaks to cool down in hot conditions or heat up in cold ones
- **How to keep workers safe wearing PPE**
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 - PPE may prevent workers removing clothing in case it exposes them to the hazard it is protecting them from.

- but make sure personal protective equipment is used if required – this includes overalls when doing hot works, with sleeves down (it maybe more comfortable to remove your uniform from underneath and just use the overalls)

Speak to your line manager regarding the following:

- Introduce flexible working patterns, such as job rotation, moving workers to cooler parts of the building where possible