



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF  
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE  
Mary T. Bassett, M.D., M.P.H.  
*Commissioner*

## 2017 Health Advisory # 8: Help Prevent Heat-Related Illness and Death Among At-Risk Patients

Please distribute to all clinical staff in Emergency Medicine, Family Medicine, Geriatrics, Internal Medicine, Psychiatry, Pharmacy and Primary Care. Please also share with your non-hospital based colleagues.

May 18, 2017

- **Identify patients at increased risk for heat-related illness.**
- **Instruct at-risk patients to stay well-hydrated and use home air conditioners or go to air-conditioned places during hot weather, especially during heat waves.**
- **Encourage caregivers to help at-risk patients stay cool and well-hydrated.**
- **Encourage low-income patients with risk factors to apply for a free air conditioner.**

Dear Colleagues,

This summer, we need your continued help to protect vulnerable patients from heat-related illness (hyperthermia) by identifying at-risk patients and providing them and their caregivers with anticipatory guidance about heat-health risks and precautions.

Hot weather can lead to severe illness and death due to heat stroke or exacerbation of chronic medical conditions. Heat waves kill more New Yorkers each year, on average, than all other natural disasters combined. Air conditioning is the most effective protection during a heat wave.

### Risk Factors for Heat-related Illness and Death

Certain individuals are at increased risk for heat-related illness and death (see checklist). Most hyperthermia victims are overcome by heat in their own homes and do not have fully working air conditioners or fail to use an air conditioner due to cost concerns. Fans do not provide sufficient cooling during extremely hot weather.

### Prevent Heat-related Illness and Death

We recommend you provide anticipatory guidance to at-risk patients and their caregivers throughout the summer season:

- Advise at-risk patients to use their air conditioners or go to air-conditioned places on hot days. Cooling centers are open to New Yorkers during heat waves. **Call 311 or go to [www.nyc.gov/oem](http://www.nyc.gov/oem) to find a cooling center during a heat wave.**
  - Suggest setting air conditioners to 78°F to provide comfort while conserving energy.
  - Advise at-risk patients to increase fluid intake during hot weather

### Checklist: Identifying Patients At Risk for Heat-Related Illness and Death

- People who do not have or use air conditioning AND have one or more of the following risk factors:
  - Aged  $\geq 65$  years
  - Chronic health conditions including:
    - Cardiovascular, respiratory, or renal disease
    - Obesity (BMI > 30)
    - Diabetes
    - Psychiatric illness such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder
    - Cognitive or developmental disorder that impairs judgment or self-care
  - Taking medications that can impair thermoregulation, including:
    - Diuretics
    - Anticholinergics
    - Neuroleptics
  - Illicit drug or heavy alcohol use
  - Socially isolated or with limited mobility

- Recommend self-monitoring, such as body weight measurement, to monitor hydration for patients who have health conditions sensitive to fluid balance or who use medications that can impair thermoregulation or cause dehydration.<sup>1</sup>
- Engage caregivers, family members and support networks to frequently check on at-risk patients, especially those who cannot care for themselves, to help them stay cool and well-hydrated before and during hot weather.
- Remind patients and caregivers to be alert to the signs and symptoms of heat-related illness or exacerbation of chronic medical conditions. For more information on heat illness, visit [www.nyc.gov/health/heat](http://www.nyc.gov/health/heat).
- Immediately report deaths where heat exposure is suspected as a direct or contributing cause to the NYC Office of Chief Medical Examiner at 212-447-2030.

## Cooling Assistance

Starting in May, low-income patients may apply to the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) for funds to purchase and install an air conditioner. Funding is limited, so we urge you to:

- Encourage at-risk patients without home air conditioning to call the Human Resources Administration at 1-800-692-0557 to determine if they meet income eligibility criteria and to request an application *as soon as possible*.
  - Note that HEAP funds may not be used to pay electric utility costs.
- Provide patients with written documentation of increased risk for heat-related illness due to a medical or psychiatric condition, or use of medication(s) that increases risk.

Thank you for your continued dedication to protecting the health of New Yorkers.

Sincerely,

*Carolyn Olson*

Carolyn Olson, MPH  
Assistant Commissioner,  
Bureau of Environmental Surveillance & Policy

*Amita Toprani*

Amita Toprani, MD, MPH  
Medical Director,  
Bureau of Environmental Disease & Injury Prevention

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Hajat S, O'Connor M, Kosatsky T. 2010. Health effects of hot weather: from awareness of risk factors to effective health protection. *Lancet*. 375:856-63.