



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

2016 Health Advisory #14: 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 24, 2016

- **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 aged ≥ 65 years or with other risk factors to apply for free air conditioner.**

Dear Colleagues,

This summer, we need your continued help to prevent 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 cause heat stroke and exacerbate chronic medical conditions, and may lead to severe complications and death. Heat waves affect New York City nearly every year and kill more New Yorkers each year on average than all other natural disasters combined. Air conditioning is the most effective protection during extreme heat.

Risk Factors for Heat-related Illness and Death

Certain individuals are at increased risk for heat-related illness and death (see checklist). In addition, most hyperthermia victims are overcome by heat in their own homes and do not have fully working air conditioners; fans do not provide sufficient cooling during extremely hot weather. Fans should only be used when the air conditioning is on or windows are open, and at night to bring in cooler air from outside.

Prevent Heat-related Illness and Death

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

- Advise at-risk patients to use their air conditioners or go to air conditioning places on hot days. Cooling centers are open to New Yorkers during extreme heat events. **Call 311 or go to 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 ≥ 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 with health conditions sensitive to fluid balance or among those using medications that can impair thermoregulation or cause dehydration.¹
- Engage caregivers, family members and support networks to frequently check on at-risk patients, especially those who cannot care for themselves, to assist them in staying cool and well hydrated before and during hot weather.
- 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.
- Immediately report deaths where heat exposure is suspected as the direct cause or a contributing factor to the NYC Office of the Chief Medical Examiner at 212-447-2030.

Cooling Assistance

For a limited time, funding is available through the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) for the purchase and installation of an air conditioner. HEAP cooling benefits are not available for subsidizing electric utility costs. We urge providers to:

- Encourage at-risk patients without home air conditioning to visit <https://mybenefits.ny.gov/> or call the HEAP Hotline at 1-800-342-3009 to determine if they meet income eligibility criteria.
- Advise qualifying patients to call 311 or the Human Resources Administration at 1-800-692-0577 or 1-212-835-7216 for an application.
- Provide patients with a written statement documenting 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 and contribution to the health of New Yorkers.

Sincerely,

Thomas Matte

Amita Toprani

Thomas Matte, MD, MPH
Assistant Commissioner,
Bureau of Environmental Surveillance & Policy

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

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.