



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF  
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE  
Mary T. Bassett, MD, MPH  
Commissioner

### 2018 Health Alert #13: Heat Health Advisory

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.

June 29, 2018

- **Be aware of the increased risk of heat-related illness among patients who do not have or use air conditioning AND: are older; have chronic physical health conditions; have serious psychiatric, cognitive or developmental disorders that impair judgment or self-care; or take medications that can impair thermoregulation.**
- **Instruct at-risk patients to use their air conditioners with recommended setting of “low” or 78 degrees; if they do not have air conditioning, encourage them to apply for a free air conditioner or go to an air-conditioned place.**
- **Encourage caregivers to help at-risk patients stay cool and well-hydrated.**
- **Report deaths where heat exposure was the direct cause or a contributing factor to the NYC Office of the Chief Medical Examiner at 212-447-2030 immediately.**

#### YOUR PATIENT COULD QUALIFY FOR A FREE AIR CONDITIONER

Patients without air conditioners can call the Human Resources Administration at 1-800-692-0557 or 311 to determine if they qualify and request an application. (See “Cooling Assistance” on next page for details)

Dear Colleagues,

The National Weather Service has forecast very hot weather and has issued a heat advisory starting on **Saturday, June 30, 2018 and likely continuing through Wednesday, July 4, 2018**. The current forecast calls for high temperatures and humidity, producing heat indices in the 95-101°F range. These weather conditions can cause heat stroke and exacerbate chronic medical conditions, and may lead to severe complications and death. This is New York City’s first heat wave of the summer season.

Updates on extreme weather conditions are available from the National Weather Service ([www.weather.gov](http://www.weather.gov)) and the NYC Office of Emergency Management ([www.nyc.gov/oem](http://www.nyc.gov/oem)).

Heat waves kill more New Yorkers, on average, than any other extreme weather event. Hot weather can cause hyperthermia or, more commonly, exacerbate chronic medical conditions. Most hyperthermia victims are overcome by heat in their homes and do not have or use air conditioners. Fans do not provide sufficient cooling during extremely hot weather. Air conditioning is the most effective protection during a heat wave.

## Provide anticipatory guidance to at-risk patients and their caregivers throughout the summer

- Use the checklist to identify patients at increased risk for heat-related illness and death.
- Advise at-risk patients to use their air conditioners or go to air conditioned places on hot days. Cooling centers will be open to New Yorkers on days that the heat advisory is in effect. **To find a cooling center in New York City during a heat wave, call 311 or go to [maps.nyc.gov/oem/cc](https://maps.nyc.gov/oem/cc).**
- Suggest setting air conditioners to “low” or 78°F to provide comfortable relief, reduce electricity costs, and conserve energy.
- Advise at-risk patients to increase fluid intake during hot weather.
- Recommend self-monitoring, such as bodyweight 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.
- Engage caregivers, family members and support networks to check frequently 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.
- 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](https://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.

Sincerely,

*Seth Guthartz*

Seth Guthartz  
Director, Office of Emergency Planning and Operation  
Division of Environmental Health

### 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
- Drug or alcohol misuse
- Socially isolated or with limited mobility

### COOLING ASSISTANCE

Low-income patients at increased risk of heat-related illness can apply for funds from the New York State Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) to purchase and install an air conditioner.

*Note that HEAP funds cannot be used to pay electric utility costs.*

#### We urge you to:

- ✓ Encourage at-risk patients without air conditioners to call the Human Resources Administration at 1-800-692-0557 or 311 to determine if they qualify and to request an application.
- ✓ Provide patients with the required written documentation of increased risk for heat-related illness due to a medical or psychiatric condition, or use of medication(s) that increases risk.