



2019 HEALTH ALERT #24

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.

- **Identify patients at increased risk for heat-related illness (see checklist).**
- **Instruct at-risk patients to use their air conditioners; if they do not have air conditioning, encourage them to apply for a free air conditioner or go to air-conditioned places, especially during heat waves.**
- **Instruct at-risk patients to stay well-hydrated.**
- **Encourage caregivers to help at-risk patients stay cool and well-hydrated.**
- **Report immediately deaths for which heat exposure was the direct cause or a contributing factor to the NYC Office of the Chief Medical Examiner at 212-447-2030.**

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 page 2 for details)

Dear Colleagues,

The National Weather Service has forecast very hot weather starting on Wednesday, August 21, 2019 through Thursday, August 22, 2019. The current forecast calls for high temperatures and humidity, producing heat indices in the 95-97°F range. These weather conditions can cause heat stroke and exacerbate chronic medical conditions, and may lead to severe complications and death.

Updates on extreme weather conditions are available from the National Weather Service (www.weather.gov/okx) and NYC Emergency Management (www.nyc.gov/oem).

Heat waves kill more New Yorkers, on average, than any other

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 these risk factors*:
 - 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
 - Have difficulty thermoregulating or use medications that can impair thermoregulation, including:
 - Diuretics
 - Anticholinergics
 - Neuroleptics
 - Drug or alcohol misuse
 - Socially isolated or with limited mobility

**Black New Yorkers and older adults are more likely to have a combination of these risk factors due, in part, to social and economic disparities that contribute to poorer health.*

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.

COOLING ASSISTANCE

Beginning May 1 through August 30 or until funding runs out, patients at increased risk of heat-related illness and who meet income and other criteria 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.

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

- Use the checklist above 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. **Call 311 or go to maps.nyc.gov/oem/cc to find a cooling center in New York City during a heat wave.**
- Suggest setting air conditioners to 78°F or “low” cool to provide comfortable relief, reduce electricity costs, and conserve energy.
- Advise at-risk patients to increase fluid intake during hot weather.
- Recommend self-monitoring of hydration, such as body weight measurement, for patients who have health conditions sensitive to fluid balance or who use medications that can impair thermoregulation or cause dehydration.
- Engage caregivers, family, and other support networks to frequently check on

and help at-risk patients – especially those who cannot care for themselves – 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.
- **Report immediately** deaths where heat exposure is suspected as a direct or contributing cause to the New York City Office of Chief Medical Examiner at 212-447-2030.

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

Sincerely,

Seth Guthartz
Seth Guthartz
Director,
Office of Emergency Planning & Operations

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