



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
Thomas Farley, MD, MPH
Commissioner

2013 Health Alert #20: Heat Health Advisory

July 4, 2013

During a heat wave, health care providers should:

- **Be aware of the increased risk of heat-related illness among seniors, people with chronic physical health conditions or psychiatric disease, those taking medications that can impair thermoregulation, and those who drink alcohol heavily or use drugs.**
- **Instruct at-risk patients to use home air conditioners or go to air-conditioned places during hot weather, and stay well-hydrated.**
- **Encourage social contacts and 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 212-447-2030 immediately.**

Dear Colleagues,

The National Weather Service has issued a heat advisory for New York City for today, Thursday, July 4 through Saturday July 6. High temperatures and humidity are expected to create heat indices in the mid to upper 90s through the holiday weekend. These weather conditions can cause heat stroke and exacerbate chronic medical conditions, leading to severe complications and death. Updates on extreme weather conditions are available from the National Weather Service (www.weather.gov) and the NYC Office of Emergency Management (www.nyc.gov/oem).

Risk Factors for Heat Stroke Death

Older adults have the highest rates of illness and death from extreme heat exposure, but people of all ages are at risk, especially those with underlying health conditions and those taking medications that can impair thermoregulation.¹ Specific risk factors for illness and death include: cardiovascular disease, a history of substance abuse, psychiatric illness such as schizophrenia or dementia, diabetes and/or obesity, or a breathing condition such as emphysema. People using drugs or drinking alcohol heavily are also more susceptible to heat illness. In addition, cerebral palsy can put younger individuals at increased risk of heat illness or death.

Hyperthermia victims are most often overcome by heat in their own homes, frequently live alone, and do not have fully working air conditioners or may only have fans, which 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 are best to use at night to bring in cooler air from outside.

Heat Related Mortality is Preventable

Air conditioning is the most important way to protect at-risk patients on hot days.

- Be alert to the signs and symptoms of heat-related illness or exacerbation of chronic medical conditions such as heart disease.
- Provide anticipatory guidance to patients and caregivers at visits during the summer season.
 - Advise at-risk patients to use their air conditioner or go to a place with air conditioning. **New York City Cooling Centers will be open starting tomorrow July 5; locations will be available through 311 or at www.nyc.gov/oem.**
 - For air conditioners with a thermostat, a setting of 78°F is recommended to provide comfort while not wasting energy.
 - Give recommendations to patients with health conditions or who take medications that can interfere with fluid balance or thermoregulation about self-monitoring (e.g. using bodyweight measurement to monitor hydration).
- Engage caregivers, family members and support networks to frequently check on at-risk patients and to assist them in staying cool and well hydrated.
- For more information, visit nyc.gov/health/heat.

The NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene reminds all health care providers to report deaths where heat exposure was the direct cause or a contributing factor to the NYC Office of the Chief Medical Examiner 212-447-2030 immediately.

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

Sincerely,

Thomas Matte

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Checklist: Most Vulnerable Populations at Risk for Heat Illness and Death

- Adults ≥ 65 years of age
- People with chronic health conditions including:
 - Cardiovascular, respiratory, or renal disease
 - Acute or chronic substance abuse
 - Obesity (BMI > 30), Diabetes
 - Psychiatric illness such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder
 - Cognitive disability
 - Social isolation or limited mobility
- Those taking medications that can impede thermoregulation, in particular the following drug classes:
 - Diuretics
 - Anticholinergics
 - Neuroleptics
- Individuals without home air conditioning or those who cannot afford to use it or don't like to use it, especially those with any of the above health conditions.