NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
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Commissioner

2015 Health Alert #16: Heat Health Advisory

July 18, 2015

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, and those taking medications that can impair thermoregulation.**
- **Instruct at-risk patients to use home air conditioners or go to air-conditioned places during hot weather, and stay well-hydrated.**
- **Consider reaching out to your most vulnerable patients and encourage social contacts and caregivers to help them 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 is issuing a heat advisory for Sunday, July 19 and Monday, July 20. The current forecast calls for high temperatures and humidity producing heat indices of in the range of 95 to 100 degrees on both days. These weather conditions can cause heat stroke and exacerbate chronic medical conditions, leading to severe complications and death. Air conditioning is the most effective protection for at-risk patients during extreme heat.

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

Risk Factors for Heat Stroke Death

The rates of serious illness and death from extreme heat exposure are increased among older adults, those with chronic cardiovascular or respiratory disease, diabetes, or obesity, those with serious mental health, cognitive, or developmental disorders that impair judgment or self-care, those taking medications that can impair thermoregulation, and those who drink heavily or use illicit drugs (see checklist on following page).

Most hyperthermia victims are overcome by heat in their own homes and do not have fully working air conditioners; some victims 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. People who are socially isolated may also be at increased risk.

Heat Related Mortality is Preventable

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

- Advise at-risk patients to use their air conditioners or go to places with air conditioning on hot days. Cooling centers are made available to New Yorkers during extreme heat events. **To find a cooling center in New York City during a heat wave, call 311 or go to** www.nyc.gov/oem.
    - Suggest setting air conditioners to 78°F to provide comfort while conserving energy.
    - Advise at-risk patients to increase fluid intake during hot weather.
    - Recommend self-monitoring, such as using 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.[1]

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

- ☐ People who do not have or do not use home air conditioning AND:
    - ☐ 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.

- 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 during hot weather. Cool showers or baths can helpful for those unable to get to an air conditioned place.
- 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.
- Health care providers should 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,

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