



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF  
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE  
Thomas Farley, M.D., M.P.H.  
*Commissioner*

## **2011 Health Alert # 12 Extreme Heat Advisory**

Please distribute this health alert and attached materials to staff in the Departments of Internal Medicine, Pediatrics, Family Medicine, Neurology, Emergency Medicine, Critical Care, Psychiatry, Geriatrics, Cardiology, Oncology, Endocrinology, Rheumatology, Rehabilitation Medicine, Nephrology, and Pulmonology. Please also share with your non-hospital based primary care colleagues.

### **During a heat wave, health care providers should:**

- Advise high-risk patients to use an air conditioner or get to an air-conditioned place.
- Be alert to heat-related illness or exacerbation of chronic medical conditions, such as heart or lung disease.
- Engage family members or other support networks to check on high-risk patients frequently.
- Monitor extreme weather alerts from the National Weather Service and the New York City Office of Emergency Management.

*July 21, 2011*

Dear Colleague,

The National Weather Service has issued an Excessive Heat Watch for New York City starting Thursday. The heat wave is expected to continue into Saturday night. High temperatures are expected to exceed 95°F. Along with the high humidity this will create heat indices that exceed 100°F possibly approaching 110°F. These are dangerous weather conditions that 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](http://www.weather.gov)) and the NYC Office of Emergency Management ([www.nyc.gov/oem](http://www.nyc.gov/oem)).

The risk of severe illness and death from extreme heat exposure is highest among:

- Older adults, especially those  $\geq 65$  years of age
- Adults of all ages with chronic health conditions, especially:
  - Cardiovascular Disease (Hypertensive and/or Atherosclerotic)
  - Diabetes and Obesity (Body Mass Index > 30)
  - Cognitive and psychiatric disorders
  - Substance Abuse
- Individuals living in high poverty neighborhoods, especially those without home air-conditioning or who cannot afford to use it.

(Read the Heat Illness Information for Health Care Providers Fact Sheet at [www.nyc.gov/health/heat](http://www.nyc.gov/health/heat))

Some signs and symptoms of heat exhaustion and heat stroke include: dizziness or syncope; muscle cramps; cool, moist skin or dry, hot skin; nausea or vomiting; headache; rapid, shallow breathing; impaired judgment; bizarre behavior; hallucinations; altered mental status; and coma. The key features of heat stroke are hyperthermia above  $>104^{\circ}\text{F}$  ( $>40^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) and central nervous system dysfunction.

**Heat-related mortality is preventable.**

Most people who die from the heat in NYC are exposed in their homes. Air conditioning is the most important way to protect at-risk patients on hot days.

- Counsel your at-risk patients on the importance of staying cool and healthy during hot weather.
- Be alert to heat-related illness or exacerbation of chronic medical conditions such as heart or lung disease.
- Advise at-risk patients to use their air conditioner or go to a place with air conditioning. To find a Cooling Center in New York City, call 311 or go to [www.nyc.gov/oem](http://www.nyc.gov/oem).
- Engage family members or other support networks to frequently check on at-risk patients.

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. For more information please see the attachments and [www.nyc.gov/health/heat](http://www.nyc.gov/health/heat).

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

Sincerely,



Nancy Clark, M.A., C.I.H., C.S.P.  
Assistant Commissioner, Environmental Disease  
Prevention



Nathan M. Graber, M.D., M.P.H.  
Director, Environmental and Occupational Disease  
Epidemiology