



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

### **2016 Health Alert #19: 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.

July 6, 2016

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

- **Be aware of the increased risk of heat-related illness among: older adults; people with chronic physical health conditions; serious psychiatric, cognitive or developmental disorders that impair judgement or self-care; 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 has issued a heat advisory for Wednesday, July 6 and Thursday, July 7. The current forecast calls for high temperatures and humidity producing heat indices in the upper 90s. These weather conditions can cause heat stroke and exacerbate chronic medical conditions, and may lead to severe complications and death. Heat waves that last for several days can be more dangerous to health. 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](http://www.weather.gov)) and the NYC Office of Emergency Management ([www.nyc.gov/oem](http://www.nyc.gov/oem)).

#### **Risk Factors for Heat Stroke Death**

Certain individuals are at increased risk for heat-related illness and death (see checklist). In addition, most hyperthermia victims are overcome by heat in their own homes and do not have or use air conditioners; fans 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 at night to bring in cooler air from outside.

#### **Prevent Heat-related Illness and Death**

- Advise at-risk patients to use their air conditioners or go to air conditioned places and limit outdoor activity especially during the hottest part of the day. 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 [www.nyc.gov/oem](http://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 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 frequently check 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.
- 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](http://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.

**Checklist: Identifying Patients at Increased 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
  - Illicit drug or heavy alcohol use
  - Socially isolated or with limited mobility

Sincerely,  
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