



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
Mary T. Bassett, M.D., M.P.H.
Commissioner

2014 HEALTH ADVISORY #13: WITH ARRIVAL OF HOTTER WEATHER, PROVIDERS ARE ENCOURAGED TO PROVIDE GUIDANCE ABOUT HEAT HEALTH RISKS AND PRECAUTIONS TO VULNERABLE PATIENTS AND THEIR CAREGIVERS

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- **Seniors, people with chronic physical health conditions, serious psychiatric or cognitive disorders, those taking medications that can impair thermoregulation, and those who drink alcohol heavily or use illicit drugs are at increased risk of heat-related illness.**
- **Air conditioning is the most effective protection for at-risk patients on hot days.**

Dear Colleagues,

With the arrival of hot weather, we need your continued help to prevent heat-related illness among your patients by providing anticipatory guidance about heat-health risks and precautions to all vulnerable patients and their caregivers.

Hot weather can cause heat stroke and exacerbate chronic medical conditions, and may lead to severe complications and death. Deadly heat waves affect New York City nearly every year and kill more Americans each year on average than all other natural disasters combined. Air conditioning is the most important way to protect vulnerable individuals on hot days.

Risk Factors for Heat-related Illness and 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,¹ and those who use illicit drugs or drink heavily.

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.

Prevent Heat-related Illness and Death

- 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 throughout the summer season.
 - 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 during heat waves, call 311 or go to www.nyc.gov/oem.**²
 - For air conditioners with a thermostat, a setting no lower than 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 on heat illness, visit www.nyc.gov/health/heat.
- The NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene reminds all health care providers to 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 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.

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