



2022 Health Advisory #9 Help Prevent Heat-Related Illness and Death

May 27, 2022

Please distribute to all clinical staff in primary care, family medicine, geriatrics, internal medicine, psychiatry, pharmacy and emergency medicine.

- **Identify people at increased risk for heat-related illness (see summary).**
- **Recommend people at increased risk for heat-related illness use air conditioning during hot weather, particularly during heat waves.**
- **Refer people without air conditioning to the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) cooling assistance program, which does not require medical documentation. If possible, help patients complete HEAP applications.**
- **Encourage people to pay attention to official announcements about where they can go to get relief from the heat.**
- **Instruct people to stay cool and well-hydrated.**
- **Encourage all eligible people to get vaccinated against COVID-19 and boosted when appropriate.**

Summary of People at Risk for Heat-Related Illness and Death

People at greatest risk for heat-related illnesses and death do not have or use air conditioning **and** have one or more of these conditions*:

- Chronic health conditions including:
 - Cardiovascular, respiratory or renal disease
 - Obesity (BMI > 30)
 - Diabetes
- Mental health problems including but not limited to depression, anxiety, and schizophrenia
- Have difficulty thermoregulating or use medications that can impair thermoregulation, including:
 - Diuretics
 - Anticholinergics
 - Psychotropics
- Substance use disorder or excessive alcohol consumption
- Socially isolated or with limited mobility
- Difficulty with self-care, cognitive difficulty, dementia

*Older adults (age ≥ 60) are more likely to have the above conditions. Black New Yorkers are also more likely to have the above conditions as a result of structural racism.

Air Conditioning Assistance: People without air conditioners can call 311 to apply for a free air conditioner and installation if they qualify. See “Cooling Assistance” on Page 2 for details.

Dear Colleagues,

As we approach summer, the Health Department needs your help preventing heat-related illness and death. Staying in un-air-conditioned homes during hot weather increases risk for heat-related death or illness. You can help by identifying people who are at-risk of heat-related illness, reminding them and their caregivers of the health risks of extreme heat (heat waves), sharing information on how they can access cooling and utility assistance, and encouraging them to plan how to find relief from the heat.

Extreme heat events kill more New Yorkers, on average, than any other extreme weather events. Hot weather both predisposes people to hyperthermia and exacerbates medical conditions, and mental health problems.

Most victims of heat-related illness do not have or use air conditioners and are overcome by heat in their homes. Fans do not provide sufficient cooling during extremely hot weather. Air conditioning is the most effective protection during a heat wave but owning and using air conditioners can be costly. Use of air conditioners may have declined due to the ongoing economic impacts of COVID-19 (see Cooling Assistance Program).

Guidance for engaging with people at greatest risk to heat-related illness or death (see Summary of People at Risk).

- Remind people that heat events (heat waves) are uncomfortable but, most importantly, they are dangerous. Encourage them to monitor weather alerts and have a plan for cooling relief during extreme heat.
- Encourage people to use air conditioners. Suggest setting air conditioners to a safe 78 degrees or “low” cool to provide comfort, save on electricity costs, and conserve energy.
- Encourage people who do not have air conditioning to apply for a free air conditioner through the Home Energy Assistance Program.

Cooling Assistance

From May 2 to August 31, 2022, people who meet income and other criteria can apply for funds from the New York State Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) to purchase and install an air conditioner.

Applications can be submitted via mail, telephone, or online for New York City residents via the Human Resources Administrations Access website (<https://a069-access.nyc.gov/accesshra>). At this time, HEAP funds cannot be used to pay electric utility costs. Since 2020, no eligibility restrictions exist related to housing benefits.

Encourage people at increased risk of heat-related illness without air conditioners to call **311** to ask for a HEAP air conditioner application. More information on the program is available at [Energy Assistance - HRA \(nyc.gov\)](https://www.nyc.gov/energy-assistance-hra).

- Guide people who are unable to afford or do not use air conditioning to visit family, friends or neighbors even for a couple of hours to stay cool during a heatwave.
 - Encourage all eligible people to get vaccinated against COVID-19, including getting booster doses if appropriate. For tools to assist in having these discussions with patients, such as [Addressing Patients' COVID-19 Vaccine Questions: A Guide for Health Care Providers](#), visit nyc.gov/VaccineTalks.
 - Talk with people who are at high risk for severe illness about how best to manage their conditions and protect themselves from both COVID-19 and heat-related illness or death.
- Inform people they can call 311 or go to maps.nyc.gov/oem/cc to find a cooling center in New York City during a heat wave.
- Advise people to increase fluid intake during hot weather.
- Recommend self-monitoring of hydration, such as body weight measurement, for people who have health conditions sensitive to fluid balance or use medications that can impair thermoregulation or cause dehydration.
- Engage caregivers and other support networks to frequently call/check on friends, family and neighbors who are at-risk of heat-related illness and to help them stay cool and well-hydrated before and during hot weather. Remind them that all hot weather – including but not limited to heat waves – can be dangerous and help them develop a plan to stay cool.
- Discuss the signs and symptoms of heat-related illness and the risk of exacerbating chronic medical conditions with people and their caregivers. Provide guidance about when to call 911 or go to the emergency department. For more information, visit nyc.gov/health/heat.
- **Immediately report** deaths where heat exposure is suspected as a direct or contributing cause to the New York City Office of Chief Medical Examiner at 212-447-2030.

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

Sincerely,

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