



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

Ashwin Vasan, MD, PhD
Commissioner

2023 Health Advisory #7 Help Prevent Heat-Related Illness and Death

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

May 18, 2023

Dear Colleagues,

Extreme heat events kill more New Yorkers, on average, than any other extreme weather event. Hot weather predisposes people to hyperthermia and exacerbates medical conditions and mental health problems. Most people who die from heat-related illness do not have or use air conditioners (ACs) and are exposed to heat in their homes. AC is the most effective protection during a heat wave but owning and using AC can be a financial burden. Structural racism acts through multiple pathways to place Black New Yorkers at greater risk, with a heat-related death rate twice that of White New Yorkers.

Guidance for engaging with people at greatest risk of heat illness and death

- **PLAN:** Remind patients that hot weather—including, but not limited to, heat waves— can be dangerous. Encourage them to monitor weather alerts and have a plan to stay cool and well-hydrated.
- **RISK:** Identify patients at increased risk for heat-related illness (see [“Factors that Increase Risk”](#)).
- **AIR CONDITIONING:** Encourage people to use air conditioners (ACs) if they have them. Suggest setting AC to a safe 78 degrees or “low” cool to provide comfort, save on electricity costs, and conserve energy. People without an AC can apply for a free one through the [Home Energy Assistance Program](#).
- **STAY COOL:** Guide people who don’t have or use AC (e.g., due to energy costs) to visit family, friends, or neighbors even for a couple of hours to stay cool when their home is too hot. During a heat wave, they can call 311 or go to [maps.nyc.gov/oem/cc](#) to find a cooling center.
- **BE A BUDDY:** Engage people to call and check on friends, family, and neighbors during hot weather.
- **MANAGEMENT:** Talk with patients who are at high risk for severe illness about how best to manage their conditions and protect themselves from heat-related illness or death. Recommend self-monitoring of hydration for people who have health conditions sensitive to fluid balance or use [medications that can impair thermoregulation or cause dehydration](#).
- **EMERGENCY:** Discuss the [signs and symptoms of heat-related illness](#), including guidance on when to call 911, and the risk of exacerbating chronic conditions with patients and their caregivers.
- **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.

Carolyn Olson

Carolyn Olson, MPH
Assistant Commissioner
Bureau of Environmental Surveillance and Policy

Madhury Ray

Madhury Ray, MD, MPH, CEM
Director, Child Care Data Analytics
Bureau of Environmental Surveillance and Policy