



## 2024 Health Advisory #9: 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.

April 9, 2024

Dear Colleagues,

Hot weather is increasing in severity and frequency due to climate change and kills more New Yorkers, on average, than any other extreme weather event. Hot weather predisposes people to hyperthermia (heat stress) and exacerbates existing medical and mental health conditions. Most 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 stress 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. Support people without an AC and refer those [who are eligible](#) to apply for a free one through the Home Energy Assistance Program, which opens on April 15. It is important to apply early, so people have AC before hot weather and because the program has closed early the last two summer due to lack of funding.
- **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](https://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 high risk 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 may use [medications that can impair thermoregulation or cause dehydration](#).
- **EMERGENCY:** Discuss the [signs and symptoms of heat-related illness](#) with patients and their caregivers, including guidance on when to call 911 and the risk of heat 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.

Sincerely,

*Carolyn Olson*

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