



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
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Commissioner

2026 Health Advisory #6: Help Prevent Heat-Related Illness and Death

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

- Air Conditioning (AC) is the most effective protection during a heat wave but owning and using AC can be a financial burden.
 - People who die from heat-related illness are often exposed to heat inside homes without AC, either because they do not have an AC or cannot afford to use it.
 - Refer people without an AC, if they [are eligible](#), to apply for a free one through the [Home Energy Assistance Program](#) (HEAP) or [The Essential Plan Cooling Program](#). Applications for both programs open **April 15. Apply for HEAP as soon as it opens because funding often runs out.**
 - Households may also be eligible for energy discounts through utility [Energy Affordability Programs](#).
 - Guide people who do not have or use an 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.
 - For people who may use [medications that can impair thermoregulation or cause dehydration](#), or who have health conditions sensitive to fluid balance, consider adjusting medication regimens and fluid restrictions on hot days. People with diabetes should check their blood sugar frequently.
 - Share [heat safety practices](#) with people who work outdoors or in hot indoor conditions including regular hydration and rest breaks in cool or shaded spaces.
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April 7, 2026

Dear Colleagues,

Hot weather is increasing in severity and frequency due to climate change. It 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. People who die from heat-related illness are often exposed to heat inside homes without AC, either because they do not have an AC or cannot afford to use it. AC is the most effective protection during a heat wave. In addition, people who work outdoors or in an uncooled place and people experiencing homelessness can be at risk during hot weather. 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 people that hot weather—not only heat waves—can be dangerous and that indoor temperatures in homes without cooling can remain high even at night. Encourage them to monitor [weather alerts](#) and have a plan to stay cool and well-hydrated.
- **Risk:** Identify people at increased risk for heat-related illness (see [“Factors that Increase Risk”](#)).
- **Air Conditioning:** Encourage people to use ACs if they have them. Suggest setting an AC to a safe 78 degrees or “low” cool to provide comfort, save on electricity costs, and conserve energy.
 - Refer people from eligible households without an AC to apply for a free one through the [Home Energy Assistance Program](#). **Applications open April 15. Funding for this program runs out quickly, apply as early as possible.** This funding may also be impacted by changes to federal agencies and grant dollars, which is another reason to advise people to apply early.
 - [The Essential Plan Cooling Program](#) is providing eligible Essential Plan members a free air conditioner to help keep their homes cool. This program is available to **Essential Plan members with the following health conditions:**
 - Asthma, Cardiovascular Disease, Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD), Chronic Migraine, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), Diabetes, Disability, End-stage Kidney Disease (ESKD), Epilepsy, Hypertension, History of Stroke, Multiple Sclerosis (MS), Obesity, Parkinson’s Disease, Pregnancy & Post-Partum, Serious Mental Illness
 - Help people [struggling to meet household energy needs](#) find assistance. [National Grid](#) and [Con Ed’s](#) Energy Affordability Program provide a discount on monthly electricity and natural gas bills for qualified households who receive government benefits. **Not all households are automatically enrolled.**
- **Stay Cool:** Guide people who don’t have or use AC 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 cool space or official cooling center during a heat wave.
- **Be A Buddy:** Encourage people to check on friends, family, and neighbors during hot weather. People also can call 311 if they see a person experiencing homelessness in need of help during a heat wave.
- **Management:** Talk with people who are high-risk about how best to manage their conditions and protect themselves from heat-related illness or death.

- For people who use [medications that can impair thermoregulation or cause dehydration](#), or who have health conditions sensitive to fluid balance, consider adjusting medication regimens and fluid restrictions on hot days.
- People with diabetes should check their blood sugar more frequently. High temperatures can change how the body uses insulin.
- [Drug and alcohol use](#) can increase the risk of overheating and dehydration, and/or mask symptoms of overheating. Hot weather also increases adverse reactions to stimulants like cocaine and methamphetamine.
- Share [heat safety practices](#) with people who work outdoors or in hot indoor conditions including regular hydration and rest breaks in cool or shaded spaces.
- **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.

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