



2021 Health Alert #23

Heat Event August 11-13, 2021:

Help Prevent Heat-Related Illness and Death

Please distribute to all clinical staff in emergency medicine, family medicine, geriatrics, internal medicine, psychiatry, pharmacy and primary care. Please also share with your colleagues.

- Identify people at increased risk for heat-related illness and death (see checklist in box to the right).
- Encourage people ages 12 and older to get vaccinated against COVID-19.
- Be aware that even as the City phases into recovery, continued COVID-19 transmission, risk mitigation measures, and lasting economic impacts may put people at risk for indoor heat exposure because they are limiting either contact with others or use of air conditioning due to cost concerns.
- Remind people who are heat-vulnerable that heat events (heat waves) can be dangerous and instruct them to use air conditioning.
- Refer patients without air conditioning to the HEAP air conditioner assistance program, which is now also available to people living in public housing or receiving Section 8 housing benefits. If available, assign a staff person to support patients with HEAP applications.
- Instruct people who are at risk to stay well-hydrated.
- Encourage people to pay attention to official announcements about places where they can go to get relief from the heat.
- Immediately report deaths for which heat exposure was the direct cause or a contributing factor to the NYC Office of the Chief Medical Examiner at 212-447-2030.

Air Conditioner Assistance

People without air conditioners can call 212-331-3126 to apply for a free air conditioner and installation if they qualify. (See "[Cooling Assistance Program](#)" box on Page 2 for details.)

Identifying People at Risk for Heat-Related Illness and Death

People who do not have or use air conditioning and have one or more of these risk factors*:

- Chronic health conditions including:
 - Cardiovascular, respiratory or renal disease
 - Obesity (BMI > 30)
 - Diabetes
 - Serious mental illness such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder
 - Cognitive or developmental disorder that impairs judgment or self-care, such as dementia
- Have difficulty thermoregulating or use medications that can impair thermoregulation, including:
 - Diuretics
 - Anticholinergics
 - Neuroleptics
- Drug or alcohol misuse
- Socially isolated or with limited mobility

***Black New Yorkers and older adults (age ≥ 60) are more likely to have a combination of these risk factors due in part to social and economic inequities that contribute to poorer health.**

Dear Colleagues,

The National Weather Service has forecast very hot weather and has issued a **heat advisory for Wednesday, August 11 through Friday, August 13, and an excessive heat warning for Thursday, August 12 from noon to 8pm**. The current forecast calls for high temperatures and humidity, producing heat indices up to 105 degrees Fahrenheit in some parts of the city on Thursday. These weather conditions can cause heat stroke and exacerbate chronic medical conditions and may lead to severe complications and death.

Updates on extreme weather conditions are available from the National Weather Service ([weather.gov/okx](https://www.weather.gov/okx)) and NYC Emergency Management ([nyc.gov/oem](https://www.nyc.gov/oem)).

Despite COVID-19 vaccination efforts, ongoing community transmission and devastating economic impacts have left an ever-growing number of New Yorkers at high risk of heat-related illness or death due to challenges in staying home safely during the summer months. During hot weather, staying in homes without air conditioning can increase risk for heat-related death or illness. You can help people mitigate the risk of heat-related illness by reminding them of the health risks of extreme heat (heat waves) and encouraging them to plan how to find relief from the heat.

Heat waves kill more New Yorkers, on average, than any other extreme weather event. Hot weather can cause hyperthermia or, more commonly, exacerbate chronic medical conditions. Both heat and COVID-19 inequitably impact communities of color.

Most hyperthermia victims are overcome by heat in their homes and do not have or use air conditioners. Fans do not provide sufficient cooling during extremely hot weather. Air conditioning is the most effective protection during a heat wave. This year, ownership and use of air conditioners may decline due to the ongoing economic impact of COVID-19. Use the [checklist on page 1](#) to identify heat-vulnerable people and provide the following guidance.

Cooling Assistance Program

People who meet income and other criteria can apply for funds from the NY State Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) to purchase and install an air conditioner. Funds are available now until August 31, 2021. Applications can be printed or will be mailed to the person. Completed applications must be mailed to NYC Human Resources Administration (HRA). *At this time, HEAP funds cannot be used to pay electric utility costs.*

We urge you to:

- ✓ Encourage heat-vulnerable people without air conditioners to call **311** or the HEAP Conference Line at 212-331-3126 to ask for a HEAP cooling assistance application. The application can also be downloaded at: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/hra/help/energy-assistance.page>.
- ✓ Provide the required written documentation of increased risk for heat-related illness due to a medical or psychiatric condition or use of medications that increases risk.

Guidance for heat-vulnerable patients and their caregivers

- Remind people that heat events (heat waves) are not just uncomfortable but can be dangerous.
- Encourage people to use their air conditioners. People may hesitate to use air conditioners due to cost concerns or discomfort of being too cold. Suggest setting air conditioners to 78 degrees Fahrenheit or “low” cool for a few hours a day to provide comfort, save on electricity costs and conserve energy.
- Encourage people without air conditioning to apply for one through the Home Energy Assistance Program (see “[Cooling Assistance Program](#)” box on page 2).
- Guide people without air conditioning to consider family, friends or neighbors they can visit even for a couple of hours to get cool during a heat wave. People can also call **311** or go to maps.nyc.gov/oem/cc to find a cooling center in New York City during a heat wave.
 - People who are fully vaccinated can visit family, friends and neighbors without physical distancing and face coverings. Those who are not fully vaccinated should continue to practice physical distancing and wear face coverings when gathering with others, especially if they are at increased risk of severe COVID-19 or gathering with other unvaccinated individuals.
 - Everyone must follow the physical distancing and face covering requirements of cooling centers, regardless of vaccination status.
- 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 who use medications that can impair thermoregulation or cause dehydration.
- Engage caregivers and other support networks to frequently call or otherwise remotely check on people who are heat-vulnerable to help them stay cool and well-hydrated before and during hot weather.
- Discuss with people and caregivers the signs and symptoms of heat-related illness or exacerbation of chronic medical conditions, and provide guidance about when to call **911** or go to an emergency room. For more information, visit nyc.gov/health/heat.
- Immediately report deaths where heat exposure is suspected as a direct or contributing cause to the NYC 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

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

Mark K. Su

Mark K. Su, MD, MPH
Director, NYC Poison Control Center
Bureau of Environmental Disease and Injury Prevention