NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

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Commissioner

2023 Health Alert #15
Prepare Your Patients at Risk of Heat-Related Death: Extreme Heat Coming

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

July 25, 2023

Dear Colleagues,

A heat advisory is expected for **Thursday, July 27 through Saturday, July 29, 2023,** with heat indices forecasted to reach excessive heat levels up to 103 or higher on Friday. Extreme heat is the deadliest of all extreme weather, and climate change is making NYC summers hotter. Heat can cause hyperthermia and worsen existing medical conditions and mental health problems. Structural racism and the resulting social and economic inequities increase the risk of heat stress for Black New Yorkers, who are twice as likely to die from heat than White New Yorkers. Most people who die of heat stroke in New York City did not have or use air conditioners and were overcome by heat in their homes. Fans do not provide sufficient cooling.

- Remind people to use AC during extreme heat and limit outdoor activity. Suggest setting ACs to 78°F or "low cool" to provide comfort, save on electricity bills, and conserve energy.
- Encourage people who do not have or use AC to visit others with AC or a cooling center, even for a couple of hours. Call 311 or go to maps.nyc.gov/oem/cc to find a cooling center.
- Remind people to continue seeking cool spaces after the heat advisory ends, as un-air-conditioned homes can remain dangerously hot for days after outdoor temperatures drop.
- Review medications that may impact thermoregulation with patients.
- Engage people to call or check on family and friends/neighbors about staying cool.
- Discuss symptoms of heat-related illness and exacerbating chronic health conditions and advise increased fluid intake when medically appropriate.
- 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.

People at greatest risk do not have or use AC and have one or more of the following factors*:

- Chronic health conditions (cardiovascular/renal disease, respiratory conditions, diabetes)
- Mental health conditions including but not limited to depression, anxiety, and schizophrenia
- Dementia, cognitive difficulty, difficulty with self-care, or difficulty thermoregulating
- Use of diuretics, anticholinergics, psychotropics, or medications affecting thermoregulation
- Substance use disorder or excessive alcohol consumption
- Socially isolated or with limited mobility
- Older adults (age ≥ 60) are more likely to have one or more of the factors above.

Sincerely,

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