NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
Alister F. Martin, MD, MPP
Commissioner

2026 Health Alert #21: Protect People at Risk of Heat-Related Death During Extreme Heat

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

- Air Conditioning (AC) is the most effective protection during a heat wave but owning and using AC can be a financial burden.
- The most common place where people die from heat stress is inside homes with no air conditioning, either due to lack of AC or inability to pay for cooling.
- Guide people who don't have or use AC (e.g., due to energy costs) to find a cool indoor space or 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, adjust medication regimens as needed on hot days and recommend self-monitoring of hydration.
- Discuss symptoms of heat-related illness including how extreme heat exacerbates chronic health conditions and advise increased fluid intake when medically appropriate.
- People with diabetes should check their blood sugar frequently when exposed to high temperatures
- Encourage people to stay safe in the heat if they work or play outdoors.

July 13, 2026

Dear Colleagues,

New York City is under a heat advisory for **Tuesday July 14** through **Wednesday July 15** with heat index values forecasted to reach 101 degrees. Hot weather will continue **through Friday**.

Extreme heat is the deadliest of all extreme weather, and climate change is making NYC summers hotter. More than 500 New Yorkers die prematurely from heat every summer. 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. People who die from heat-related illness are most commonly exposed to heat inside homes where they do not have or use air

conditioners (ACs). Fans do not provide sufficient cooling in current weather conditions.

Some medical conditions increase heat vulnerability.

- Review medications that may impact thermoregulation with people.
- High temperatures can change how the body uses insulin. People with diabetes should check their blood sugar more frequently.
- 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.

Air Conditioning (AC) is the most effective protection during a heat wave.

- Remind people to use AC during extreme heat and limit outdoor activity. Indoor temperatures can remain high even at night when it is cooler outside. 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 go to a cool place, such as visiting others with AC or a cooling center, even for a few hours. Call 311 or go to maps.nyc.gov/oem/cc to find a cool space.
- Remind people to be careful leaving cool spaces if they are returning to a hot environment. They may need to visit cool spaces even after the heat advisory ends, as un-air-conditioned homes can remain dangerously hot for days after outdoor temperatures drop.
- Engage people to call or check on family, friends, and neighbors about staying cool. People also can call 311 if they see a homeless person in need of help during a heat wave.
- Encourage people who work outdoors or in hot indoor conditions to ask their employer about available heat safety actions in their workplace, such as regularly hydrating, taking rest breaks in cool spaces, and wearing sun-protective clothing.

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
- Use drugs or drink heavily, as this may lead to increased core body temperature, decreased ability to regulate body temperature, increased the risk of dehydration, and/or mask symptoms of overheating.

- 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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