

Speaker 1: [00:00](#) Hello everyone, welcome to "Prep Talk," the emergency management podcast. Find out what you need to know about preparedness. Get all the latest tips from experts in the field, and learn what to do before the next disaster strikes. From the Emergency Management Department in the city that never sleeps, here are your hosts, Omar Bourne and Allison Pennisi.

Omar Bourne: [00:27](#) Hello everyone, thank you for listening, I'm Omar Bourne.

Allison Pennisi: [00:31](#) I'm Allison Pennisi. Thank you for joining us. We want you to come back as often as you can, so feel free to add "Prep Talk" to your favorite RSS feed. You can also follow us on social media.

Omar Bourne: [00:40](#) It's summer time in the city, and this episode we are talking about senior preparedness during the heat season.

Allison Pennisi: [00:46](#) That's right Omar, older adults are more at risk during excessive heat. But, here to break it all down are two people who play very important roles in preparing New Yorkers for heat emergencies. Please welcome to our show Linda Whitaker, assistant commissioner for emergency preparedness at the New York City Department for the Aging, as well as Johanna Conroy, director of human services here at New York City Emergency Management. Ladies, thank you so much for joining us.

Johanna Conroy: [01:12](#) Thanks, Allison and Omar.

Linda Whitaker: [01:14](#) Thank you.

Omar Bourne: [01:15](#) Linda, I'm going to start with you. Now, many of our listeners may be unfamiliar with the Department for the Aging. Can you tell us about your agency and some of the programs that you have for older adults?

Linda Whitaker: [01:25](#) Well, experience says that many people in New York City don't know that there are 1.5 million older adults, age 60 and older, who live here. The Department for the Aging is committed to helping them age in their homes and communities. Our mission is to eliminate ageism and ensure the dignity and quality of life of diverse older adults. We also work to support caregivers through service, advocacy, and education.

Linda Whitaker: [01:52](#) We accomplish these goals by partnering with hundreds of community based agencies to provide services through our senior centers, naturally-occurring retirement communities, case management and home care agencies, home delivered

meals, mental health and friendly visiting in each borough. We have senior employment services unit, a caregivers resource center. Elderly crime victims resource center. Grandparents resource center. Foster grandparents program. Bill-payer program, and volunteer resource center program. Which addresses many of the things that we see that occur to people as they age in New York City.

- Omar Bourne: [02:34](#) You know what I like about this is that within Linda's first sentence, I've learned so much more about the Department for the Aging.
- Allison Pennisi: [02:42](#) We work with the Department of the Aging very closely, which is, it's incredible, the amount of work that is done by this agency, so it's so wonderful to have you. Now, Johanna, you are director of human services here at New York City Emergency Management, and you also play a very big role in preparing New Yorkers for emergencies. Can you explain to our listeners what your role is specifically?
- Johanna Conroy: [03:02](#) Sure, thanks Allison. The human services unit at New York City Emergency Management works to create plans to address the needs of our citizens leading up to disasters and after emergencies. This includes for example sheltering, large scale feeding, and basic needs that may arise or be unmet after a disaster. We work with nonprofit and government partners, such as DFTA, to create plans with everyone's families in mind. Adults, children, seniors, people with disabilities, and even their pets.
- Omar Bourne: [03:34](#) For our listeners DFTA, which you may hear us say, is actually Department for the Aging.
- Allison Pennisi: [03:38](#) Linda, the Department for the Aging, or DFTA, works closely with our city's Emergency Management Department to prepare older adults before emergencies. Can you explain to our listeners what that partnership looks like? We know we love it, but we would love to tell New Yorkers why.
- Linda Whitaker: [03:53](#) The Department for the Aging has our unit, which goes out into the community, as well as partnering with the New York City Emergency Management agency senior outreach coordinator, who visit many senior centers, naturally occurring retirement communities, churches, community organization, block associations, to bring the message of the importance of being prepared before an emergency occurs.

Omar Bourne: [04:21](#) If I remember correctly, our senior outreach specialist, I want to say was about 100 senior centers that he visited, 100 presentations that he did last year. We're really out there sharing the message of preparedness. Now, a big part of senior preparedness is making sure that seniors have an emergency plan. Linda, how important are these plans to helping seniors before an emergency?

Linda Whitaker: [04:51](#) Well, emergencies are really classified as an event that's going to take place and you don't expect it, but you need an immediate response.

Omar Bourne: [04:59](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Linda Whitaker: [05:00](#) Preparing beforehand reduces the stress, it also helps the emergency personnel that may come in to help the older person know and what information they'll have. Their immediate contacts, where they're going to go, what kind of medications if there's a real, where their life is in a crisis. If they can't go home where they're going to stay. If they do all of this information ahead of time, this presents a really good plan, because stress can do a lot to you. You just don't know.

Omar Bourne: [05:40](#) We always like to say that you don't want to wing it when there is an emergency. It's better to have a plan and make sure that you're prepared, and it's great that our senior coordinator goes out to the senior centers and teach them about how they can make an emergency plan. It's important for everyone in the family from the youngest of the age until the oldest of the age, so we want to make sure that everyone is prepared, and it's great that we can go out and help them with that.

Linda Whitaker: [06:07](#) The Department for the Aging also sends out workers that will help people prepare. We do a lot of weekend ones as well as during the week, so.

Omar Bourne: [06:16](#) Wonderful. Johanna, switching gears here. Emergency Management works closely with the City's Health Department to issue safety tips to New Yorkers. Specifically vulnerable populations like older adults before extreme heat. Who are some of the other people who are at risk for heat related illness?

Johanna Conroy: [06:36](#) Sure, Omar, there are a few other categories of people that are at higher risk for illness and death after, during a heat emergency. Such as people who have chronic medical or

psychiatric conditions. Those who misuse drugs or alcohol, and in addition people who are taking certain medications could have a higher sensitivity and should consult with their doctors about potential complications due to extreme heat.

- Allison Pennisi: [07:01](#) Johanna, Omar mentioned safety tips, and I think the basic ones from my own perspective is if there's extreme heat drink lots of water, plenty of fluids, stay out of the sun, use air conditioning. For those who don't have air conditioning, the city opens up cooling centers. What type of facilities are cooling centers and where can people go to find out more information of whether there's one open in their neighborhood.
- Johanna Conroy: [07:27](#) That's a great question, Allison. Cooling centers are made up of a variety of different facilities. Senior centers as Linda mentioned, libraries, community centers, and then other facilities as well. A lot of those facilities are already accessible to the public, such as libraries that are open to the public any of their usual hours. But, the cooling center plan asks some of our other partners such as senior centers to allow people in there that don't usually meet the criteria in which to access those programs. During a cooling center event we partner with all of these community centers and libraries and senior centers to give New Yorkers as many potential places to go to cool off as possible.
- Johanna Conroy: [08:12](#) For them to find a cooling center that's open near them, we would ask them to call 311, or they could visit NYC.gov/beattheheat.
- Omar Bourne: [08:21](#) Linda, as Johanna mentioned, some of the cooling centers are senior centers. Tell us about how using senior centers as cooling centers can help keep seniors safe?
- Linda Whitaker: [08:31](#) There's over 260 senior centers in the city, so that puts one in every community just about, or more than one. Wherever you live you could look it up or visit the local senior center, and partake of the air conditioning, which is what is required to be a cooling center. We want you to stay cool so that you will be well. This place is where seniors can come. They can play games, they can have a book club, they can dance, they can have a throwdown party, they get to eat. It's all of these things that the senior centers become during cooling center time, which many seniors like to come there just for that.
- Allison Pennisi: [09:18](#) Instead of a cooling center it's a cool center.

Omar Bourne: [09:20](#) Yeah, right, pretty much.

Linda Whitaker: [09:21](#) I like that.

Allison Pennisi: [09:21](#) Yeah, they're far cooler than I am, that's what it sounds like. Now, Johanna this question is for you. New York City Emergency Management helps manage a program called the Advance Warning System, to message service providers who work with vulnerable populations like seniors. Who are these service providers, and how can service providers sign up for the Advance Warning System?

Johanna Conroy: [09:45](#) Allison, our Advance Warning System partners are a mix of service providers, as you mentioned, and also healthcare providers that work with vulnerable populations. Our partnership with them is really valuable because we feel like they know better how to message their patients and their clients, better than the City knows how to. What we like to do is we like to send our messaging to them and allow them to get it out to their clients and patients in the way that makes the most sense for them. Some people may need a phone call because they are not on social media, they don't get emails, and no one knows that better than their service provider or their doctor.

Johanna Conroy: [10:24](#) We send out the Advance Warning System messages, and we send them out to the providers so that they can message their clients and their patients. If you're a provider and you feel like you would like to get these Advance Warning System messages, you can go online to register. The website is advancewarningsystemnyc.org.

Allison Pennisi: [10:49](#) It's very cool. In addition to Notify NYC, which is the City's emergency communications program, which we highly encourage every New Yorker to sign up for, the fact that there's also a program specifically for service providers is very cool. Johanna, we've been talking about senior centers as cooling centers, which I think are really just cool centers because they get to do so many great activities.

Omar Bourne: [11:12](#) That's the new name for it now.

Allison Pennisi: [11:12](#) It should be the new name for it now, we have to patent that.

Omar Bourne: [11:14](#) Yeah.

Allison Pennisi: [11:15](#) Remind me after we wrap. New York City cooling centers, I know that there are over 500 locations that people can visit?

Johanna Conroy: [11:22](#) That's correct.

Allison Pennisi: [11:22](#) Okay, wow. Are they open all summer long?

Johanna Conroy: [11:26](#) That's a great question, Allison. Some of them, such as the libraries, are open to the general public all the time. There are other ones such as senior centers and community centers that are set up to serve very specific populations most of the year. During a heat emergency though, they open up to everyone in the city as we mentioned before. When the City issues a heat emergency, that's very much, very well messaged, and during that time all of these 500 plus centers are open to the general public.

Allison Pennisi: [11:57](#) Wow, so people can visit NYC.gov/beattheheat, or call 311 to find out where these cooling centers are located, which is fantastic. Linda already mentioned that we have almost one community center or senior center per neighborhood, right? Wow, that's just remarkable.

Omar Bourne: [12:19](#) The good thing about it, as Johanna said, is that the City will message prior to a heat emergency to notify the public that these cooling centers are going to be open. You can call 311 or you could check the website to find your nearest cooling center, or as Allison likes to say, cool center.

Allison Pennisi: [12:39](#) It is a cool center. I want them to invite in.

Omar Bourne: [12:43](#) In New York City Emergency Management, along with the Department for the Aging and the New York City Health Department, has worked on a "Beat the Heat" ad campaign. Featuring older New Yorkers providing heat related safety tips. We've worked with Mayor David Dinkins, along with seniors from New York City's senior centers. Linda, this question is for you, I want to know how important is it for seniors to get involved in helping to prepare each other and other New Yorkers for heat emergencies.

Linda Whitaker: [13:13](#) "Beat the Heat" is a program that seeks to strengthen the community cohesion, resilience, and reduce vulnerabilities to adverse heat impacts for seniors. This program reaches out to those seniors who are in vulnerable communities, and what it does is distribute extreme weather preparedness tips and safety

messaging before the heat season comes, as well as during those emergency periods when there's heat. One of the most important things is that it has partners that check in on the elders who are at risk for heat emergencies.

- Omar Bourne: [13:56](#) Yeah, and I mean one of the messaging tips that we use is to be a good neighbor. Make sure that you check in on your family, your friends, especially those who you know are vulnerable or those who may live alone to make sure that they're okay.
- Allison Pennisi: [14:14](#) Absolutely. To our listeners, you can view the "Beat the Heat" ads in local newspapers, bus shelters, and Link NYC kiosks throughout the city, starting this season and through I think through the beginning of fall, right?
- Omar Bourne: [14:31](#) Sounds about right.
- Allison Pennisi: [14:32](#) Yeah, very exciting. We absolutely love this campaign, it's been really wonderful working with the Department for the Aging and the City's Health Department on this. It's really important to message and emphasize that extreme heat effects all New Yorkers, and we all need to take steps to be prepared. Great conversation with Linda and Johanna about heat emergencies and how seniors can be prepared. For those wanting to know more information, you can get tips by visiting NYC.gov/beattheheat, or call 311. Remember, be a good neighbor, be a good buddy, especially during times of extreme heat. It's important. New Yorkers need to depend on one another, especially when there's a weather emergency.
- Allison Pennisi: [15:12](#) That's this edition of "Prep Talk." If you like what you heard you can listen any time online, or through your favorite RSS feed. Until next time, stay safe and prepared.