

Summer Heat in the City

New Yorkers know that summertime in the City can be stifling, hot and humid. For older New Yorkers, extreme heat is not only uncomfortable, it can be dangerous and cause heat illness and death. Each year, more Americans die from heat waves than all other natural disasters combined.

The same older adults who are vulnerable to extreme heat, are most vulnerable to COVID-19. The best way for older adults to be safe from extreme heat is to drink plenty of water and stay inside in a cool place. And while opening windows can help increase airflow, using an air conditioning unit is the best way to stay cool while at home. In New York City, more than 80% of heat stroke deaths in recent years involved victims who were exposed to extreme heat in homes without air conditioning.

For many New Yorkers, the high cost of an air conditioning unit makes it inaccessible, especially now given the financial hardship that has accompanied COVID-19. To help older New Yorkers stay cool and safe from COVID-19, the [NYC Department for the Aging](#) is working with the City's GetCool Air Conditioner Program to provide 74,000 free air conditioners and installation service to low-income older adults.

So far, more than 48,000 of these air conditioners have been installed. Thanks to these air conditioners, many older adults can now stay cool in their homes this summer



Older New Yorkers find respite from the heat at Grand Street Settlement Neighborhood Senior Center when open as a cooling center.

and will be able to use these units in future hot summers.

In addition to the GetCool Air Conditioner Program, New York State's Cooling Assistance program, called HEAP, can also help. The program covers the cost of an air conditioner or a fan, plus installation, at a price of up to \$800. Applications are currently open through August 30. New Yorkers can call 311 for eligibility requirements and for information on how to apply.

For New Yorkers who do not have air-conditioning, the City has more than 230 public cooling centers across the five boroughs. Cooling centers have been an important resource during heat emergencies every year. This year due to COVID-19, the City is taking extra steps at cooling centers to protect New Yorkers from getting sick. All cooling centers are operating at limited capacity and following social distancing guidelines. They are also providing hand sanitizer and free face coverings to attendees. Because cooling centers are an important resource for older New Yorkers, some senior centers in our network have been operating as cooling centers during heat emergencies. As an extra safety measure, cooling centers at senior center locations are open exclusively to adults over the age of 60.

I myself have visited a few cooling centers at our senior center sites and can vouch that while there are no social activities being offered, like board games and congregate meals, they do provide safe and cool respite from the heat. At many, the main, congregate room is filled by chairs arranged at six feet, or more, apart and all attendees keep their face masks on while inside. It is not the same senior center experience that we know and love, but during these unprecedented times, it is the safest option for older adults.

Though the City has many ways to help older New Yorkers stay cool and safe, nothing can replace the value of a friendly check-in by a neighbor, family member, or a friend. A quick

call to make sure that an older adult in your life has the resources to stay cool this summer could save a life. This summer, we want older New Yorkers to be safe from both COVID-19 and extreme heat. By using all available City resources and staying connected with each other, we can make sure this happens.

For more information on how to beat the heat this summer, visit nyc.gov/beattheheat or call 311.



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