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Excessive Heat/High Heat Guidance & Reminders

Guidance for Hospitals, Nursing Homes, Adult Care Facilities, Homecare Agencies, Hospice and Diagnostic and Treatment Centers

SUMMARY

- Healthcare providers should anticipate an increase in heat-related illnesses and complications from vulnerable populations during times of excessive heat in the summer months.
- **Healthcare providers should be vigilant of symptoms of possible heat-related illnesses** such as dehydration, heat stroke, and complications from heart and lung disease.
- **Homecare agencies and healthcare providers should consider reaching out their most vulnerable patients** and encouraging them and caregivers to help them stay cool and well hydrated.

The NYSDOH is providing this guidance document, as very high temperatures can be dangerous and potentially life threatening for many individuals, particularly for those at a higher risk for heat related illness (see the patient checklist on the following page).

Most heat related deaths occur when people are indoors in locations without air conditioning. Please immediately review this advisory and high heat weather policies and procedures with all staff. Illness related to high heat may not be evident for several days.

Both New York State and Federal regulations require inpatient and residential healthcare providers to maintain comfortable and safe temperature levels within their facilities. Above all, providers have the responsibility to remain especially vigilant during high heat conditions, to monitor the health status of their staff, patients and residents. Healthcare providers should take the necessary precautions to ensure that patients, residents, staff and visitors are comfortable and safe.

Information for Healthcare Providers:

During a heat wave, healthcare providers should:

- Instruct at-risk patients and their caregivers to use home air conditioners, or seek cooling centers or locations that are air-conditioned such as a mall, library or supermarket; if patient must remain home, stay on the lowest floor of their home, use window shade or sheets to block the sun at windows. A list of cooling centers can be found on the [NYSDOH Cooling Center Locator](#).
- Consider using tools available to them, such as patient notification systems, to reach out to their most vulnerable patients and encourage them and caregivers to help them stay cool and well hydrated.
- Be aware of the signs of heat illness (see below).
- Reinforce Protective Public Health Messaging (listed on the following page).

Some heat related conditions include:

Heat Exhaustion: Heat exhaustion is a milder form of heat-related illness that can develop after several days of exposure to high temperatures and inadequate or unbalanced replacement of fluids. Those most prone to heat exhaustion are elderly people and those with high blood pressure.

Symptoms: Heavy sweating, paleness, muscle cramps, tiredness, weakness, dizziness, headache, nausea, vomiting and fainting. Skin may be cool and moist. Pulse rate will be fast and weak, and breathing will be fast and shallow. If heat exhaustion is untreated, it may progress to heat stroke.

Management: Move the person to an air-conditioned environment and offer cool, non-alcoholic beverages. Have the person rest or provide them with a cool shower, bath, or sponge bath. Ensure they are wearing lightweight clothing. Seek medical attention if symptoms worsen or last longer than one hour.

Heat Stroke: Heat stroke is the most serious heat-related illness. It occurs when the body becomes unable to control its temperature: the body's temperature rises rapidly, the sweating mechanism fails, and the body is unable to cool down. Body temperature may rise to 106°F or higher within 10 to 15 minutes. Heat stroke can cause death or permanent disability if emergency treatment is not provided.

Checklist: Identifying Patients At-Risk for Heat Related Illness and Death

- People who do not have or do not use home air conditioning AND:
 - Aged ≥ 65 years
 - Infant or young child
- Chronic health conditions including:
 - Cardiovascular, renal, or respiratory disease
 - Obesity (BMI > 30)
 - Diabetes
 - Psychiatric illness such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder
 - Cognitive or developmental disorders that impairs judgement or self-care
- Taking medications that can impair thermoregulations including:
 - Diuretics
 - Anticholinergics
 - Neuroleptics
- Illicit drug or heavy alcohol use
- Socially isolated or with limited mobility
- Have extended outdoor exposure (e.g., outdoor workers, athletes, etc.)

Symptoms: An extremely high body temperature (above 103°F), red, hot, and dry skin (no sweating), rapid, strong pulse, throbbing headache, dizziness, nausea, confusion and unconsciousness.

Management: Call for immediate medical assistance while you begin cooling the victim. Do the following:

- Move the person to a shady area.
- Cool the person rapidly, using whatever methods you can. For example, immerse them in a tub of cool water; place the person in a cool shower; spray them with cool water from a garden hose; sponge the person with cool water; or if the humidity is low, wrap them in a cool, wet sheet and fan him or her vigorously.
- Do not give alcohol to drink.

Heat Cramps: People who sweat a lot during strenuous activity are prone to heat cramps. Heat cramps may also be a symptom of heat exhaustion. People with heart problems or those on a low-sodium diet should seek medical attention for heat cramps.

Symptoms: Muscle pain or spasms - usually in the abdomen, arms or legs.

Management: Seek medical attention for heat cramps if they do not subside in 1 hour. If medical attention is not necessary, take the following steps:

- Stop all activity and have the person sit quietly in a cool place.
- Offer clear juice or a sports beverage.
- Inform the person not to return to strenuous activity until after a few hours after the cramps subside because further exertion may lead to heat exhaustion or heat stroke.

Protective Public Health Messaging

- Be aware of the signs of heat illness and immediately get themselves or any person demonstrating these symptoms to a cool place, have them remove extra clothes, and drink lots of water. If they don't improve, call 911 or get them to the emergency room right away.
- Avoid strenuous activity and exercise during the hottest part of the day. Instead limit these activities to the early morning hours or in the evening--when the temperatures tend to be lower.
- Drink at least 2-4 glasses of water per hour during extreme heat, even if you do not feel thirsty. Avoid beverages containing alcohol or caffeine.
- Infants less than 6 months of age should not be given water. On hot days, they can be breastfed more often, or given additional breast milk or formula in a bottle.
- Stay out of the sun and seek air-conditioned settings. If air-conditioning is not available, stay on the lowest floor of your home, keep the window shades or blinds closed to block the sun, or go to an indoor space with air conditioning (such as libraries, malls, supermarkets, or friends' homes).
- Take a cool shower or bath using tepid water. Sudden temperature changes may make you feel dizzy or sick.
- If you must go outdoors, wear sunscreen with a high sun protector factor (SPF) rating of at least 15 and a hat to protect your face and head. Wear loose-fitting, lightweight and light-colored clothing. Cover as much skin as possible to avoid direct sun on your body.

More information can be found at:

<https://www.health.ny.gov/environmental/emergency/weather/hot/>

Information for Healthcare Facilities:

The following measures should also be taken by providers immediately, and in general during the summer months to ensure the life-safety capabilities of their facility:

- ***Immediately test all generators involved in supplying power to areas for patient care and in accordance with program regulations. Ensure that you have sufficient generator fuel on hand to cover at least the period of extreme heat.***
- If you experience cooling equipment malfunctions during normal business hours, immediately contact your service contractor and make sure to inform your NYSDOH Regional Office program. For malfunctions that occur on nights, weekends or holidays, after contacting your contractor, be sure to contact the NYSDOH Duty Officer at 1-866-881-2809 and inform them of the problem. In the situation where air conditioning equipment has failed, individual room temperatures should be frequently monitored.
- If facilities are in need of assistance *and have exhausted all normal channels of assistance through vendors or contractors*, they should contact their County Office of Emergency Management as a backup for assistance and resources.
- Check all doors/windows are sealed correctly during use of cooling systems and draw curtains or shades to limit sunlight. Encourage residents to sit away from the windows and direct sun.
- Review emergency evacuation plans and ensure that they are up to date.
- At residential facilities, encourage residents to stay indoors unless absolutely necessary to go outdoors during the extreme heat. If residents do go outdoors ensure they have a beverage, preferably water, with them. Residents should wear a hat or cap or carry an umbrella to shield them from the sun when outdoors. Know the whereabouts of all residents to assure they are not exposed to the heat for long periods.
- Frequently offer cold fluids/beverages to patients and residents to avoid heat illness.

Hospitals may see an increase in emergency department visits. Homeless individuals or others seeking temporary relief may present to your hospital or nursing home. Although hospital personnel are not required to perform a medical screen on these individuals on the basis of these circumstances alone, if an individual presents to the hospital ED complaining of, or exhibiting symptoms of heat related illness, medical screening must be completed to rule out emergency medical conditions in accordance with normal operating procedures.

- If you have homeless patients ready to be discharged during the high heat conditions, please follow your standard policy and procedure to ensure a safe and appropriate discharge for the individual and work with appropriate partner organizations to ensure that they have transport to available housing or emergency shelter/cooling center.
- If the individual does not have heat related condition but wishes to remain in a public area of the hospital to stay to stay cool, please allow them to do so. Check with your local emergency management office for locations and hours of cooling centers in your county and offer this list to these individuals so they are aware of other options if needed.

Nursing homes may also experience individuals seeking shelter from the heat, and should review their plans regarding reception and treatment of such individuals per 10 NYCRR 415.26,

which requires such plans in response to "...an internal or external emergency resulting from natural or man-made causes including but not limited to ... severe weather..." and ensure that individuals are provided immediate necessary care for relief, and then sent for any further emergency care that is necessary.