



New York State
Office of Mental Health



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
Thomas R. Farley, MD, MPH
Commissioner

June, 2012

Dear Executive Director,

During hot weather, people who take certain medications or who have underlying medical conditions, including those who suffer from mental illness, are at increased risk for heat stroke or exacerbation of chronic medical conditions, which can lead to severe complications and death.

Heat related mortality is preventable and you can play a critical role in mitigating some of the most devastating effects of extreme summer heat. Preparation and planning before heat waves arrive can help your organization respond more effectively and keep your consumers healthy.

It is vitally important that you work with your program staff to ensure that the following guidelines are implemented:

- Flag those at highest risk for heat-related illnesses based on health risks, medications that may cause dehydration, ***lack of access to air conditioning***, ability to express thirst and obtain water for themselves, and ability to communicate being hot or uncomfortable.
- During routine contacts, provide information and help consumers prepare for hot weather stressing that an air conditioned environment is the best protection against heat-related illness.
- Make plans for outreach during heat emergencies, prioritizing those at highest risk. Document these plans and communicate them to staff.

Program Directors in your organizations will be receiving more detailed guidance (attached) and we encourage you to reinforce the importance of implementing these recommendations with your staff.

Thank you for your continued dedication and contribution to the health of New Yorkers.

Sincerely,

Michael F. Hogan, Ph.D.
Commissioner
NYS Office of Mental Health

Thomas R. Farley, MD, Master of Public Health (MPH)
Commissioner
NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene

Plans for Outreach

During routine client visits in the warm season (May through September) direct staff to maintain documentation of:

- A regular schedule for monitoring consumers
- A check list to document outreach and reinforce heat safety. Essential items for the checklist include:

Check those that apply	Essential Questions	What to Do
	<p>Is there a working air conditioner?</p> <p>Is the consumer using it?</p> <p>If no air conditioning in room or apartment does consumer have access to an air conditioned space (e.g. common room in building, cooling center nearby, other public place)?</p>	<p>If not, assess reason and provide assistance, (e.g. explain importance demonstrate how to use it). If extreme heat period is extended, make arrangements to go to a place with air conditioning.</p> <p>Instruct and encourage consumer to visit alternative location for at least a period of time each day.</p> <p>If using a fan, put it in or next to an open window. Do not use a fan in a closed room without open windows or doors. Fans may not provide enough protection in very hot weather.</p>
	<p>Is there enough water to drink?</p>	<p>Provide water and encourage the person to drink at regular intervals.</p>
	<p>Is the person wearing too many clothes?</p>	<p>Encourage the person to remove excess layers of clothing.</p>

Signs of Heat Stress

Check those that apply	Serious Signs	What to Do
	Rapid heartbeat	Call 911. This is a medical emergency. While waiting for help, move the person to a cool area. Remove extra clothes. Use water, a cool cloth, and a fan to cool the person.
	Throbbing headache	
	Dry skin (no sweating) – muscle cramps	
	Confusion, anger, fighting, indifference, sedation	
	Trouble breathing	
	Vomiting and/or diarrhea	
	Unconscious or unresponsive	

Check those that apply	Warning Signs	What to Do
	Decreased energy	Get the person to a cool place, encourage removal of extra clothes. Give the person water.
	Loss of appetite, nausea	
	Lightheadedness, feeling faint	
	Heavy sweating	

Risk Factors for Heat-Related Illness

Although anyone can suffer from heat-related illness, some people are at greater risk. *Organize your list of consumers in advance to flag those at highest risk for heat-related illnesses:*

1) Home Environment

- Lack of a working air conditioner, or
 - o Unable or unwilling to use air conditioning because of cost, energy overload concerns, or comfort issues
 - o Unable or unwilling to go to a cool place (i.e., socially isolated, limited mobility, fear, depression)
- Ability to hydrate:
 - o Limited access to water, unable to get water for themselves because they are bedbound or have decreased mobility, or refusal of elderly and/or patients with chronic illness to drink regularly or to drink more during extreme heat (for fear of having to go to the bathroom).

2) Health Risk Factors:

- Age 65 and older
- One or more medical conditions, including:
 - o Heart disease
 - o High blood pressure
 - o *Psychiatric* or cognitive disorders
 - o Diabetes Mellitus
 - o Obesity
 - o Respiratory conditions

- Consumption of alcohol or illegal drugs such as cocaine and “ecstasy” which can cause dehydration.
- Certain medications also affect the body’s ability to maintain a safe temperature. Always check with the prescribing physician to determine particular risks. Medications that increase risk include:
 - Tricyclic antidepressants, including Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs)
 - Antipsychotic or neuroleptic medications
 - Certain mood stabilizers
 - Some medications for Parkinson’s disease
 - Diuretics
 - Beta blockers
 - Calcium channel blockers
 - Antihistamines

Helping Consumers to Prepare for Extreme Heat

During routine contacts, provide information and help consumers plan for hot weather. Involve family, friends and when appropriate and possible neighbors in preparation:

- If an at-risk individual has an air conditioner, encourage them to **use it** during periods of extreme heat. Many people prefer not to use their air conditioners, either to save money or because they do not like cold air. Suggest tips to conserve energy, such as using air conditioning in the room consumers spend the most time in, closing off other rooms, and cutting down on light and other electronics use. Advise consumers to set the air conditioner’s temperature at 78° Fahrenheit. Check the air conditioner to make sure it is in good working condition, clean the filter if needed, and insulate any spaces between the air conditioner and window to make sure there is a tight fit
- If an at-risk individual does not have an air conditioner, discuss any other options they may have during periods of extreme heat. Spending even a few hours in an air conditioned environment can be beneficial. Help them identify public spaces nearby that they can go to sit in or be in air conditioning. Help them make a plan for how they will get to a friend, neighbor or relative’s house, a library, shopping mall, or a Cooling Center in their neighborhood (call 311, TTY: 212-504-4115, or visit <http://www.nyc.gov/oem> for more information).
- Advise consumers to wear light, loose-fitting clothing. Bathing or showering with cool (not cold) water can be helpful for those able to do so safely. Be careful of changing body temperature too quickly.
- Discuss medical conditions or medications that could increase risk during hot weather. If necessary, check with the consumer’s doctor or advise consumers to do so concerning precautions they should take during hot weather and whether self-monitoring hydration (e.g. using bodyweight measurement to ensure they are getting enough water) is recommended.

- Remind consumers to drink plenty of water both outdoors and indoors, even if they don't feel thirsty, during hot weather, and to avoid strenuous activity. If they are unable to communicate thirst, make sure they are given water at regular intervals throughout the day.
- Advise consumers that during periods of extreme heat, a fan alone may not be enough to keep them cool. When the room temperature is in the high 90s or above, fans will not prevent heat-related illness because they just blow the hot air around. Fans may be useful when used in conjunction with an air conditioner or at night to help circulate cooler air from open windows if air conditioning is not used.
- Educate family and friends about symptoms of heat illness and prevention tips. Encourage consumers to check in on family/friends/neighbors who may also need help *at least daily* during heat waves.

Distribute the City's "Beat the Heat" and "Keep Cool" brochures. Call 311 or search "Beat the Heat" or "Keep Cool" on [NYC.gov](https://www.nyc.gov) for more information.