

Health Advisory

Preventing Heat-related Illness during Excessive Summer Heat

May 18, 2021

High temperatures combined with high humidity can cause heat illness and can exacerbate chronic medical conditions, particularly among those who are at increased risk. This summer you can help to prevent heat-related health complications by providing guidance about risks and sharing information about resources with patients and their caregivers.

Many patients at increased risk for heat-related illness are also at increased risk for complications resulting from COVID-19 infection. **Assist the following groups to stay safe in the heat and to get vaccinated for COVID-19:**

- Individuals that are 65 years of age or older
- People with chronic health conditions, including:
 - Cardiovascular, respiratory, or renal disease
 - Metabolic disorders (e.g., diabetes)
 - Psychiatric illness, such as schizophrenia
 - Cognitive or developmental disorders that impair judgment or self-care
- Patients taking medications that impair thermoregulation (e.g., diuretics, anticholinergics, and neuroleptics)
- People who use alcohol or drugs
- People who are socially isolated, living alone or have limited mobility
- People experiencing homelessness
- Outdoor workers, particularly those who work during the day
- People who do not have air conditioning in their homes
- Persons having more than one of the above risk factors are at greater risk of heat-related illness

During the summer season, the Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH) recommends that healthcare providers assess patients for heat-related illness risk:

- Remind patients and caregivers about the importance of seeking medical attention for heat-related illnesses. Patients experiencing symptoms of heat stroke should call 911. Patients who are vomiting or experiencing worsening symptoms of heat exhaustion for more than 1 hour should seek immediate medical attention.
 - Expect that patients may be reluctant to access care due COVID-19. Assure patients of infection control and safety measures that are being taken at your facility.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Patients should not let COVID-19 stop them from accessing medical care for heat-related illnesses.
- Educate patients about how to stay cool and recognize early symptoms of heat-related illness.
- Discuss environmental risks in patients' homes during clinical assessment.
- Encourage family members and caretakers to check in on seniors, especially individuals who are living alone.
- Raise awareness about City services that may be activated during a Heat Health Emergency.

Heat Stroke	Heat Exhaustion
Very high body temperature	Heavy sweating
Red, hot, dry skin (no sweating)	Headache
Rapid, strong pulse	Weakness
Headache	Fatigue
Dizziness	Dizziness
Nausea	Nausea or vomiting
Confusion, loss of consciousness	Muscle cramps

- Educate at-risk patients on ways to stay cool, hydrated and safe from COVID-19:
 - Stress the importance of using air conditioning at home if available.
 - Suggest that air conditioners be set to 78° or “low” at home to provide relief while also conserving energy and reducing electricity costs.
 - If seeking cooling outside the home, advise patients to follow local masking guidance.
 - If masks are required indoors, advise patients to choose lightweight, cotton fabrics and to change the mask if it gets damp. Hot weather will make masks more uncomfortable.
 - Discuss environmental risks in patients’ homes during regular clinical assessment, such as the lack of air conditioning or improper ventilation.
 - Advise patients to increase fluid intake (if appropriate), preferably by drinking water. Alcohol, caffeine, and sugary drinks should be avoided.
- Encourage caregivers and family members to monitor at-risk patients frequently.
- Raise awareness about government services that may be activated during a Heat Health Emergency:
 - Philadelphia Corporation for Aging (PCA) Heatline (215-765-9040): callers can get information on heat safety or talk to a nurse about heat-related medical concerns.
 - Utility shut-offs will be halted during declared heat health emergencies.
 - Patients who need help with electricity bills may be directed to PECO at 1-888-480-1533 or to their local Neighborhood Energy Center:
<https://www.phila.gov/departments/division-of-housing-and-community-development/neighborhood-resources/neighborhood-energy-centers-necs/>

Additional information about staying safe during excessive heat is available on the Health Information Portal.

- https://hip.phila.gov/Portals/_default/HIP/EmergencyResponse/HealthHazards/HeatBrochure.pdf