

Health Advisory

Preventing Heat-related Illness during Excessive Summer Heat

June 20, 2018

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

Use the following list to identify patients at increased risk for heat-related illness:

- Age 65 or older
- People with chronic health conditions, including:
 - Cardiovascular, respiratory, or renal disease
 - Metabolic disorders, including diabetes
 - Psychiatric illness, such as schizophrenia
 - Cognitive or developmental disorder that impairs judgment or self-care
- Patients who take medications that can impair thermoregulation, such as 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
- Persons having more than one of the above risk factors are at greater risk of heat-related illness

SUMMARY POINTS

Healthcare providers can help prepare patients and their caregivers for excessive heat events by:

- Identifying at-risk patients
- Educating patients about how to stay cool and how to recognize early symptoms of heat-related illness
- Encouraging family members and caretakers to check in on seniors, especially individuals who are living alone
- Raising awareness about City services that may be activated during a Heat Health Emergency, including the PCA Heatline and cooling centers

During the summer season, the Philadelphia Department of Public Health recommends that healthcare providers do the following:

- Remind patients and caregivers how to recognize the signs and symptoms of heat-related illness, including the following:
 - Heavy sweating
 - Headache
 - Weakness, fatigue, dizziness
 - Nausea or vomiting
 - Confusion, loss of consciousness
- Educate patients at increased risk for heat-related illness on ways to stay cool and hydrated:
 - Recommend that patients seek relief in air-conditioned spaces at home, at a relative or friend's home, or at public places, such as senior centers, libraries or shopping malls
 - Suggest that air conditioners be set to 78° or "low" at home to provide relief while also conserving energy and reducing electricity costs
 - 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 City 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.
 - Cooling centers: residents can seek relief from the heat at certain air-conditioned spaces that will extend their hours of operation. Patients can call 311 to find out which cooling centers are open.

PDPH informational flyers for patients are available here:
https://hip.phila.gov/Portals/_default/HIP/EmergencyResponse/HealthHazards/HeatBrochure.pdf

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