

Health Advisory

Preventing Heat-related Illness during Excessive Summer Heat May 14, 2024

SUMMARY POINTS

- Identify at-risk patients.
- 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 older adults, especially those who are living alone.
- Raise awareness about City services that may be activated during a Heat Health Emergency, including the PCA Heatline and cooling centers.

High temperatures combined with high humidity can cause heat illness and can exacerbate chronic medical conditions, particularly among those who are at increased risk. **During the summer season, the Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH) recommends that healthcare providers help prevent heat-related health complications by providing guidance about risks and sharing information about resources with patients and their caregivers:**

- **RESOURCES:** Raise awareness about services that may be available 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 3-1-1 to find out which cooling centers are open.**
 - **Utility shut-offs** will be halted during declared heat health emergencies.
 - PDPH encourages medical professionals to support patients in maintaining uninterrupted utility service. See this recent Health Advisory for more information: https://hip.phila.gov/document/4338/PDPH-HAN-0441V-Utilities-04.10.2024_1.pdf/.
 - Patients who need help with electricity bills may be directed to [PECO](#) at 1-800-774-7040 or to their local [Neighborhood Energy Center](#).
- **IDENTIFY** patients who are at increased risk for heat-related illnesses, including:
 - Adults over age 65
 - 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
 - Pregnant people
 - 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

- **ASSESS RISK:** Use [this questionnaire available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) to identify patient risk factors for health harms from the heat or poor air quality.
- **EDUCATE:** Remind patients and caregivers about the importance of seeking medical attention for heat-related illnesses.
- **COOLING:** Stress the importance of seeking 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.
 - Discuss environmental risks in patients' homes during regular clinical assessment, such as lack of air conditioning or improper ventilation.
 - Fans should only be used if indoor temperatures are less than 90°F. In temperatures above 90°F, a fan can increase body temperature.
- **HYDRATE:** 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 and especially during [Heat Health Emergencies](#).

Additional information about staying safe during excessive heat is available at www.phila.gov/heat.