

Health Advisory

Preventing Heat Related Illness During Excessive Hot Summer Weather

July 20, 2017

The National Weather Service (NWS) has issued an Excessive Heat Warning for Thursday July 20 and Friday July 21 due to very hot and humid weather affecting the Philadelphia area. Concurrently, the Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH) has issued a Heat Health Emergency for the same time period which activates additional city services to help people stay cool and safe. PDPH is issuing this Health Advisory to inform the clinical community about heat related illness prevention strategies and to provide resources to share with patients to decrease heat related adverse health events throughout the summer season. Over the next two days, the NWS is projecting the heat index to reach 100 (a measure of high temperature and humidity). Nighttime low temperatures are projected to be in the mid to upper 70s which will not allow significant cooling to occur between days. These weather conditions can cause heat exhaustion or heat stroke and can exacerbate chronic medical conditions particularly among those at increased risk.

SUMMARY POINTS

During declared heat warnings and heat health emergencies, healthcare providers can identify and help prepare at risk patients from heat related illness by:

- Identifying and educating patients on ways to stay cool and safe
- Encouraging family members and caretakers to check in on elderly and those living alone
- Promoting city services including the PCA Heat Line (215-765-9040) and open Cooling Centers

Patients at increased risk for heat related illness include:

- Age 65 or older
- Very young children and infants
- 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 (e.g., diuretics)
- People who use alcohol or illicit drugs
- People who are socially isolated, living alone or with limited mobility
- Outdoor workers, particularly those who work during the day
- Homeless people living outdoors

Persons having more than one of the above risk factors are at greater risk of heat related illness. Animals and pets should also be considered during extreme heat events to ensure their wellness and safety.

During the summer season and excessive heat events, PDPH is recommending that healthcare providers do the following:

- Identify and educate patients at increased risk for heat related illness on ways to stay cool and hydrated. Educational flyers for patients can be downloaded here:
<https://hip.phila.gov/Portals/default/HIP/EmergencyResponse/HealthHazards/HeatBrochure.pdf>
- Encourage caregivers and family members to monitor at-risk patients frequently
- Promote city resources to patients during a Heat Health Emergency to include:
 - Philadelphia Corporation of Aging (PCA) Heat Line (215-765-9040) to get information on heat safety or talk to a nurse about heat related medical problems
 - Cooling Centers in Philadelphia, air-conditioned spaces during the hottest times of the day. For locations, call 311 or go to: <http://gsg.phila.gov/map#id=b091d039d3d2495dbe02914d3216db8b>