



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF

HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE

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*Commissioner*

## 2012 DOHMH Advisory #11

July 5, 2012

### FREE AIR CONDITIONERS FOR NEW YORK CITY RESIDENTS AT HIGH RISK OF HEAT ILLNESS

- **Seniors and those with chronic physical or mental illness are at increased risk for heat related illness and death. Air conditioning is protective.**
- **Encourage low-income patients over 65 years of age or those with chronic physical or mental health conditions to apply for a free air conditioner.**
- **Document patient's medical need and risk for heat-related illness to include with the application.**

Dear Colleagues,

On June 29<sup>th</sup> Governor Andrew M. Cuomo announced assistance for low-income New Yorkers whose health issues pose a medical emergency during extended hot weather. In order to protect vulnerable New Yorkers, New York State has set aside \$3 million in funding through the federally-funded Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). We need your help to identify and encourage eligible, high risk individuals without home air conditioning to apply for this benefit or ask their family members to apply on their behalf.

- Patients can qualify for this program by meeting LIHEAP income criteria. (For a four-person household, the maximum gross annual income to qualify is approximately \$49,500.) Those who want to see if they qualify under HEAP's income guidelines should visit [www.mybenefits.ny.gov](http://www.mybenefits.ny.gov) or call 1-800-342-3009. For the Hearing Impaired, TTY Phone number: 1-866-875-9975.
- In addition, patients are required to submit a health care provider's note affirming that the patient's health condition increases the risk for heat-related illness.
- Complete information about the program and the application can be obtained by calling the NYS HEAP Hotline at 1-800-342-3009 or 311.
- Alternatively, you can refer patients to the following borough-specific weatherization groups. These are the phone numbers listed for each borough (in bold):
  - Brooklyn — **(718) 638-5705**
  - Bronx — **(718) 299-0500**
  - Manhattan — **(212) 822- 8340**
  - Queens — **(718) 784- 1444 Ext 179**

Hot weather can exacerbate chronic medical conditions, leading to severe complications and death. Extreme heat events kill more Americans each year on average than *all other natural disasters combined*.

Individuals at greatest risk include:

- Adults  $\geq$  65 years of age
- People dependent on others for their basic needs due to debilitating physical or mental health conditions
- People with chronic health conditions including:

- Cardiovascular, respiratory, or renal disease
- Obesity (BMI > 30)
- Diabetes
- Psychiatric illness such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder
- Substance use disorders
- Cognitive disability
- Social isolation or limited mobility
- Those taking medications that can impede thermoregulation, including the following drug classes:
  - Diuretics
  - Anticholinergics
  - Neuroleptics

Of particular concern are individuals with any of the above health conditions and who don't have air conditioning in their home.

### **Heat Related Mortality is Preventable**

*Air conditioning is the most important way to protect at-risk patients on hot days.*

- Be alert to the signs and symptoms of heat-related illness or exacerbation of chronic medical conditions such as heart disease.
- Provide anticipatory guidance to patients and caregivers at visits prior to and during the summer season.
  - Advise at-risk patients to use their air conditioner or go to a place with air conditioning. **To find a cooling center in New York City during heat waves, call 311 or go to [www.nyc.gov/oem](http://www.nyc.gov/oem).**
  - For air conditioners with a thermostat, a setting of 78°F is recommended to provide comfort while not wasting energy.
  - Give recommendations to patients with health conditions or who take medications that can interfere with fluid balance or thermoregulation about self-monitoring (e.g. using bodyweight measurement to monitor hydration).
- Engage caregivers, family members and support networks to frequently check on at-risk patients and to assist them in staying cool and well hydrated.
- For more information, visit [www.nyc.gov/health/heat](http://www.nyc.gov/health/heat).
- The NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene reminds all health care providers to report deaths where heat exposure is suspected as the direct cause or a contributing factor to the NYC Office of the Chief Medical Examiner 212-447-2030 immediately.

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

Sincerely,

*Nancy Clark*

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