

HEAT SAFETY FOR OLDER ADULTS



This tip sheet is intended to give health center staff a starting point to engage older patients in preparing for extreme heat to stay cool and avoid illness.

Rising global average temperature is associated with widespread changes in long-term climate changes, with studies indicating heat-related weather events will likely become more frequent or intense.¹ As average temperatures across the United States continue to get warmer, older adults are at an increased risk for dangerous health consequences from extreme heat. As people age, their bodies become less efficient at regulating body temperature, and they may have a harder time adapting to sudden changes in temperature.² This can be further complicated by multiple chronic conditions and their related medications that affect the body's ability to respond to heat, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity, and certain neurological disorders.

It is important for older adults to take steps to prevent heat-related illnesses during hot weather, such as staying hydrated, wearing appropriate clothing, avoiding outdoor activities during the hottest part of the day, and staying in air-conditioned spaces as much as possible.³ Health center staff can assist older adult patients to understand the health risks of extreme heat and develop emergency plans that take the following social determinants of health (SDOH) factors into consideration:

Social Network: Who do they rely on for support?
Who do they provide care for?

Access to Resources: How does their housing and income impact their ability to cool their living space?
How close is the nearest cooling center?

Eligibility for Assistance: Have they applied for state Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) benefits? What support is available from the local area agency on aging or other community partners?



Health centers can play a vital role in helping older adults understand how to prevent heat-related illnesses. Heat safety should be discussed with patients during routine checkups or well ahead of hot summer months. Open-ended questions to engage older adults on this topic might include:

- **How do you keep yourself cool when there is a heat advisory or warning?**
- **What concerns do you have for your health and well-being during a heat wave?**

Health center staff should utilize local and national resources to understand and design personalized emergency plans that account for the older individual's unique needs. Patient-facing messages should also be developed in advance to be disseminated before, during, and after an extreme heat event. Those responsible for outreach should consider a variety of communication methods to make contact with as many at-risk older patients as possible, including phone recordings, text messages, emails, and social media posts. Taking extra precautions to promote heat safety will reduce the risk of related illness in older adults.

Heat Safety Resources

- **The Climate Resilience for Frontline Clinics Toolkit: Heat**
 - *Tailored information for providers, patients, and administrators*
- **Tip Sheet: Hot Weather Safety Tips For Older Adults**
 - *Available for patients in English and Spanish*
- **NYC Health Heat Wave Guidance for Service Providers**
 - *Example guidance for assessment and response*

REFERENCES

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