



To: CAHAN San Diego Participants

Date: August 5, 2025

From: Public Health Services Public Health Preparedness and Response Branch

Health Advisory: Keeping Patients Safe during Extreme Heat Events

Key Messages

- **Screen** [patient populations](#), especially during extreme heat events, who are more vulnerable to extreme heat adverse effects. These include older adults, young children and infants, those with chronic medical conditions, and pregnant people.
- **Review** medications and alcohol/substance use that affect [thermoregulation](#) with patients.
- **Refer** vulnerable populations and those without access to air conditioning to the County's [Cool Zone program](#).
- **Remind** patients and their caregivers to never leave pets, children, or disabled adults in locked vehicles, especially during extreme heat events, to avoid severe adverse events or death.
- **Plan** with patients to help them develop their own heat plan using the County's [Consumer Version Excessive Heat Response Plan](#) and [HeatReadyCA.com](#).

Situation

Heat-related deaths and illnesses are preventable. Exposure to extreme heat can cause illness, injury, and death. Heat-related illnesses could include heat rash, sunburn, heat cramps, heat exhaustion, heat stroke, and even death.

A vulnerable individual may experience heat-related illness or fatality at any time when temperatures are high, but the overall effect of prolonged periods of heat (i.e., heat wave) increases the risk of illness and death in the population.

Summer temperatures in California contribute to the deaths of 20 people on average per year. In 2024, San Diego County had a total of 21 deaths related to hyperthermia and heat-related illness. In 2023, there were 158 heat-related ED discharges for heat illness/injury and 41 hospitalizations across San Diego County. This number has steadily increased over the past ten years. Hyperthermia or heat stroke was the highest reported heat-related symptom for EMS calls in San Diego County in 2023.

The National Weather Service (NWS) reports that heat is the leading cause of weather-related fatalities in the United States. Public health interventions are warranted during periods of extreme heat to prevent heat-related illness and death.

Extreme heat can cause serious illness, including heat stroke, and heat exhaustion. Per NWS, the following groups are particularly vulnerable to heat, especially if they do not have access to air conditioning:

- **Young children and infants** are particularly vulnerable to heat-related illness and death, as their bodies are less able to adapt to heat than are adults.
- **Older adults**, especially with pre-existing illnesses, on certain medications, living alone or with limited mobility.
- **People with chronic medical conditions** are more likely to have a serious health problem during a heat wave than healthy people.
- **Pregnant women**, extreme heat events have been associated with adverse birth outcomes such as low birth weight, preterm birth, and infant mortality, as well as congenital cataracts.

Parents and caregivers should never leave pets, children, and disabled adults in locked cars and especially during extreme heat events. Pets, children, and disabled adults have died in locked cars during extreme heat events.

It is important to distinguish heat exhaustion from heat stroke understanding that exhaustion can lead to stroke. Symptoms of heat exhaustion most commonly include syncope, sweating, vomiting, and heat cramps. It is important that even before these symptoms start moving to a cool location such as one of the County Cool zones, or a place that has air conditioning to cool off, hydrate with water, and use other methods to cool down such as taking a cold shower, using cold packs, or fans to cool down.

Symptoms of heat stroke are really distinguished by hyperthermia (increased body temperature especially above 103° F) and the body's inability to thermoregulate body temperature. Persistent elevation of temperature leads to increased oxygen consumption and leads to tachycardia and hypoxia and ultimately leading to multi-organ failure. Heat stroke is an emergency and should be treated in an emergency room or hospital with the goal of lowering the body temperature and close monitoring and may involve mechanical ventilation, fluid resuscitation, and external cooling methods.

Actions Requested

1. **Screen** [patient populations](#), especially during extreme heat events, who are more vulnerable to extreme heat adverse effects. These include older adults, young children and infants, those with chronic medical conditions, and pregnant people.
2. **Review** medications and alcohol/substance use that affect [thermoregulation](#) with patients.
3. **Refer** vulnerable populations and those without access to air conditioning to the County's [Cool Zone program](#).
4. **Remind** patients and their caregivers to never leave pets, children, or disabled adults in locked vehicles, especially during extreme heat events, to avoid severe adverse events or death.
5. **Plan** with patients to help them develop their own heat plan using the County's [Consumer Version Excessive Heat Response Plan](#) and [HeatReadyCA.com](#).

Resources

1. [Heat Safety Tips and Resources](#)
2. [Cool Zones](#)
3. [Heat and Medications – Guidance for Clinicians | Heat Health | CDC](#)
4. [Consumer Version Excessive Heat Response Plan](#)

5. [Home | HeatReadyCA.com](#)

Thank you for your participation.

CAHAN San Diego

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