# Five Steps to help your patients stay safe on hot days

Help your patients document action steps in a **Heat Action Plan**.

**Heat can harm physical and mental health. Make a 5-Step Heat Action Plan with your patients to help them protect their health on hot days. Since warmer temperatures can worsen air quality, CDC's heat action plan also includes steps to protect health from poor air quality. Go to these 5 Steps if your patients include children or teens with asthma, pregnant women, or adults with cardiovascular disease.**

## 1) Assess heat- and air quality-related risk factors.

- ☐ **Review your patient's health status and determine if any underlying health conditions** may increase the risk of heat harms.
- ☐ **Use the HEAT** questionnaire to assess risk factors related to
  - **H**ousing and Indoor Environment
  - **E**mergency Preparedness
  - **A**wareness of Health Risks
  - **T**emperature and Outdoor Environment
- ☐ Based on risk factor screening, **refer your patient to needed services or engage social work support** in your clinic as appropriate.

## 2) Educate your patients on how to stay cool during hot days.

- ☐ **Review the HeatRisk Tool and how it works with your patients**. The tool assigns colors to each level of risk and recommends protective actions by color level.
  - Ask your patients to monitor their symptoms at HeatRisk yellow and orange and determine which level applies to them. Their Heat Action Plan should reflect the applicable HeatRisk level.
  - Most patients can take action when the HeatRisk is **orange**.
  - Some people will be more sensitive to heat and will need to take action when HeatRisk is **yellow**.
- ☐ In addition to the **recommended actions to take when outside for each level of HeatRisk**, everyone can
  - Wear light-colored, loose-fitting clothing that covers arms and legs; a hat with a brim that shades the face, ears, and back of the neck; and sunglasses.
  - Apply broad spectrum sunscreen that filters out UVA and UVB rays. The sunscreen should have an SPF of 30 or higher.
  - Schedule outdoor activities during the coolest time of the day or evening, if possible.
- ☐ **Review heat-related symptoms** with your patients.

- Help them understand signs and symptoms that their underlying health conditions may be worsened by heat. For example, when it is hot, people with diabetes may have worse blood sugar control.
- Review symptoms of heat-related illness and help your patients understand the difference between heat exhaustion and heat stroke.
- Review which symptoms constitute an emergency and what actions to take in an emergency setting.

☐ Talk to your patients about how to stay cool indoors. They can
- Use an air conditioner if they have one or find a location that does. Even a few hours in a cool location can lower the health risk from heat.
- Use fans only if indoor temperatures are less than 90°F. In temperatures above 90°F, a fan can increase body temperature.
- Cool their bodies with a cool shower, a damp cool cloth, or a spray bottle of cool water.

☐ Direct your patients to information about public resources such as cooling centers, pools, and splash pads. The nearest cooling center locations can be located by calling 2-1-1, checking public resources, or contacting your local health department or emergency management agency.

☐ Refer patients who need assistance with home energy costs to the Low-Income Heat Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

## 3) Educate your patients on how to stay hydrated.

☐ Review signs and symptoms of dehydration, which include

Cold, clammy skin
Dizziness or feeling lightheaded
Rapid heart rate
Excessive sweating or an inability to sweat
Fatigue
Headache
Muscle cramps or spasms
Nausea
Abdominal cramping
Swelling in extremities
Darker color urine
Infrequent urination
Thirst

☐ Emphasize the importance of regular and consistent fluid and food intake throughout the day.

☐ Advise patients to try to limit beverages higher in sugars, sodium, and caffeine, which may lead to dehydration. See Guideline 4 of the dietary guidelines.

☐ Advise patients that water is usually the best choice, although sports drinks containing electrolytes may be necessary if sweating for several hours.

☐ Remind patients that alcohol can cause dehydration and may worsen the risk of **heat related illness if consumed when in hot settings.**

☐ Patients with nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea will need particular attention to avoiding dehydration and fluid and electrolyte imbalance, which heat exposure can compound.

☐ To avoid sunburn, which can promote dehydration, see # 2 “How to Stay Cool”.

## 4) Educate your patients on air quality. Heat can worsen air quality, which can lead to additional health harms.

- ☐ **Review the Air Quality Index (AQI)** with your patients at the HeatRisk Dashboard, the phone's weather app, or at airnow.gov. Ensure they know how to access, understand, and use the information including which actions they can take at specific air quality levels.
- ☐ **Review Steps to Take for Good Indoor Air Quality.**
  - Remind your patients that indoor air can be as polluted as outdoor air.
  - Educate patients that cigarette and e-cigarette smoke, candles, and air fresheners are indoor sources of air pollution.
  - If possible, bring outdoor air in when cooking indoors.
  - Encourage patients to allow clean indoor air inside when the AQI is less than 100 (or <50 for individuals sensitive to poor air quality).
- ☐ **Review Information on Air Filters**
  - **Discuss air purifiers, also known as air sanitizers, air cleaners, and air filters used in HVAC systems**. While these devices cannot remove all air pollutants, they can improve indoor air quality for many pollutants when used properly. A list of portable cleaners can be found here.
  - Some homes have HVAC systems with replaceable filters. These filters have MERV (Minimum Efficiency Reporting Values) ratings or are designated as HEPA (high efficiency particulate air) filters. To effectively remove indoor air pollution, HEPA filters or filters with MERV of 13 or higher can be used.
  - Air filters should be replaced regularly. Replacement frequency depends on how much air pollution is present but can be done every 60-90 days.
  - Do-it-yourself (DIY) air cleaners may be a more affordable and accessible alternative to commercial versions to filter out smoke particles and can be constructed using a box fan and a high-efficiency home air filter.

## 5) Make a plan with your patients for medication management on HeatRisk orange, red, and magenta days.

- ☐ Review the Heat and Medications page to familiarize yourself with how medications interact with heat, which medications are most likely to do so, and an approach to medication management during hot days.
- ☐ **Ensure your patients know to not abruptly stop medications and to take all medications as directed unless otherwise guided by you or another clinician.**
- ☐ Review your patient's medication list with them, highlighting medications that may need to be adjusted because of interactions with heat. Document with your patient any medication adjustments during hotter weather and when to resume their normal medication schedule.

- ☐ Provide guidance on proper storage of medications, counsel patients not to leave medications in a car or other places that can get excessively hot, and help your patients develop a medication storage plan in the event of a heat-related power outage.
- ☐ Encourage your patients to reflect heat and medication information discussed with you in the medication section of their Health Action Plan.