



Department of Health

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Executive Deputy Commissioner

June 18, 2021

Re: DAL NH 21-09 Heat Advisory

Dear Nursing Home Administrator:

With the arrival of extended periods of high temperatures and humidity, you are encouraged to take the necessary precautions to prevent heat related illnesses. It is also an opportune time to ensure that your generator is in good working order and ready to function during the power outages that take place due to summer storms and other unexpected occurrences.

PRECAUTIONS TO PREVENT HEAT RELATED ILLNESS

Residents with a history of dehydration, cardiovascular and/or pulmonary disease are particularly susceptible to heat related illnesses and complications. To assist in preventing heat illness among your residents during the hot and humid weather, it is recommended that all staff be especially alert to the signs, symptoms and consequences of heat prostration, heat stroke and heat cramps.

Heat Prostration:

- **Warning Signals:** Gradual weakness, nausea, anxiety, excess sweating, syncope (fainting).
- **Appearance and Signs:** Skin is pale, grayish and clammy.
- **Management:** For syncope, place head down and administer cool, slightly salty fluids immediately.

Heat Stroke (Serious Emergency):

- **Warning Signals:** Headache, weakness, and sudden loss of consciousness.
- **Appearance and Signs:** Hot, red, dry skin, little sweating, very high temperature, and hard, rapid pulse.
- **Management:** Immediately cool skin by wrapping or immersing in cold water or ice. Call 911 or paramedics.

Heat Cramps:

- **Warning Signals:** Severe cramps and spasms in the arms, legs and/or abdomen.
- **Appearance and Signs:** Skin may be hot and dry, or cool and clammy, depending on the humidity. The muscles feel like hard knots.
- **Management:** Provide cool fluids and foods containing sodium chloride (table salt).

The following measures should be taken to prevent heat related illnesses:

- Alert staff to monitor residents for the signs and symptoms of heat illness (listed above). Notify the physician of such observations and obtain medical services, if needed.
- Review resident medications and identify those that may cause residents to become more susceptible to heat and sunlight.
- Assure that facility policies and procedures for heat emergency situations are current, complete, and known to all staff.
- Monitor temperatures on nursing units, particularly on hot, humid days.
- Use air circulating and air-cooling equipment (window fans, floor fans, mechanical ventilation systems and air conditioners) to achieve and maintain air movement and air cooling within the facility, especially in resident rooms and resident use areas.
- Monitor choice of resident's clothing to ensure they are appropriate in extreme temperatures and are not too heavy or vapor-impermeable.
- Protect against temperature elevations within the facility by closing window blinds and shades on sun exposed walls; opening windows on shaded walls; and turning off heat generating devices, such as lights in the daytime.
- Assure, through active encouragement and assistance when necessary, that residents maintain adequate fluid intake, e.g., water and fruit juices. Alcohol should be avoided.
- Adjust menus as needed, incorporating items such as cold plates, salads, etc. Consult with your dietician.
- Encourage residents not to lie or sit in direct sunlight, e.g., if outside, encourage residents to sit in shaded areas. Use sunscreen, as necessary.

GENERATOR MAINTENANCE

Weekly inspections, monthly exercising under load for 30 minutes, and any required or manufacturer recommended servicing of the generator should continue in accordance with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) adopted requirements of the 2012 edition of the Health Care Facilities Code and the 2010 edition of the Standard for Emergency and Standby Power Systems of the National Fire Protection Association; NFPA 99 and NFPA 110.

Trained facility staff should be available at all times to handle all routine and any unexpected generator issues. It is recommended that the facility have a relationship with a qualified outside contractor to deal with any generator issues that cannot be handled by facility staff. It is also important ensure that a sufficient fuel supply is on hand and additional fuel is readily obtainable in the case of an extended power outage. With proper care and maintenance, the facility generator will help ensure a safe, healthy, and comfortable environment for residents and staff.

Heat stress issues can also affect facility staff especially when wearing required personal protective equipment (PPE). Nursing homes should ensure facility staff have opportunities for required breaks and for hydration. Consider implementing buddy systems for staff to have verbal check-ins with each other to assess for symptoms of heat-related illness. Consider providing education to staff about heat related illness first aid and emergency procedures.

Thank you in advance for your efforts to provide our residents with a safe environment that allows them to enjoy a meaningful and satisfying quality of life. If you have any questions, please email nhinfo@health.ny.gov.

Sincerely,

Sheila McGarvey
Director, Division of Nursing Homes
and ICF/IID Surveillance
Center for Health Care Provider Services
and Oversight