



Promoting wellness and recovery

John R. Kasich, Governor • Tracy J. Plouck, Director • 30 E. Broad St. • Columbus, OH 43215 • (614) 466-2596 • mha.ohio.gov

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Dear Medical Director/Program Administrator:

With the summer months approaching, it is important to recognize the warning signs of heat-related illness and learn how to prevent it. Although anyone can be affected by heat-related issues, the elderly, the very young and individuals with medical problems including those with psychiatric disorders and addictions are especially susceptible. With appropriate preventive actions, heat-related illness and deaths can be avoided.

Enclosed is our brochure titled "Heat-related illness in individuals with mental illness and addictions," which provides information for providers, caregivers and consumers about how to identify, avoid and respond to heat-related illness. If you have not already done so, please consider developing a heat emergency preparedness plan to help keep your patients and staff safe this summer. Monitor the weather, setting a limit that will trigger action, such as two or more successive days of 85-degree heat or one day of 90-degree heat (even lower temperatures in conditions of high humidity). Alert staff and clients of the high heat condition and provide a cool environment and plenty of cool liquids. Encourage clients to dress in lighter clothing, and discourage activities that will expose them to prolonged periods of high heat and humidity.

I recommend that you evaluate each consumer in your care for risk of heat-related illness. Risk factors include chronic medical conditions, particularly heart disease or high blood pressure, obesity, diabetes, alcohol use, psychotropic medication usage. Those patients who do not have the knowledge, ability, or resources to prevent heat-related problems should receive assistance to help them be safe.

Individuals who fall into the high-risk category should be monitored regularly for heat exposure. Please be sure to check on patients residing in the community to be certain they have access to a cool environment and adequate liquids. Prior to discharge from hospitals and other residential treatment sites, assure that patients are going to a safe environment that will protect them from heat-related problems. Advise patients of the availability and location of "cooling centers" to use as respite and encourage everyone to drink plenty of fluids.

Please be sure that treatment staff protect themselves in the same way, especially case managers and others who spend much of their time in the community. Like our patients, they need to keep well-hydrated and as cool as possible. Treatment providers need to stay healthy to help our patients stay healthy!

We should always be alert for signs of heat exhaustion or heat stroke, especially in high-risk clients. Heat stroke can cause death if untreated. Please advise your staff, patients and their caregivers of the symptoms, and if heat stroke is suspected seek medical care immediately. Heat-related illness is preventable when the appropriate precautions are taken.

Please distribute these brochures to consumers, family members, staff and caregivers to help them have a safe and healthy summer.

Sincerely,

Mark A. Hurst, M.D., Medical Director

Attachment