



Planning Guidance for Extreme Heat:
Collective Strategies for Mitigating Risk developed by the
2024 Climate Resilience Learning Collaborative

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Introduction

The content in this document was developed through the 2024 NACHC Climate Resilience Learning Collaborative.

Following presentations from experts in the field, members of the Learning Collaborative participated in exercises using the IdeaBoardz brainstorming and collaboration website <https://ideaboardz.com>. The resulting content was refined and organized for inclusion in this document.

This guidance is intended to support health center planning for extreme heat events and should be used in conjunction with other planning guidance and best practices. It may be used to help update existing plans, provide insights into developing new plans, and to highlight potential needs and opportunities during emergencies. Not every idea presented here will be applicable to every health center.

The content included in this document may be used to contribute to meeting regulatory requirements that address risk identification, staff training, disaster planning, development and maintenance of an emergency management program, internal communications, external communications, and partnerships. For details on the standards presented in a crosswalk format, see the [Emergency Preparedness/Emergency Management Requirements: Crosswalk of The Joint Commission \(TJC\) and Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services \(CMS\) Standards for Federally Qualified Health Centers \(FQHCs\)](#).

HRSA Acknowledgement

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Mitigating Patient Risks from Extreme Heat

Certain patient populations are at higher risk of negative health outcomes during extreme heat events. Health centers can help mitigate this risk through planning and patient education.

Patient Identification and Screening

- Add heat related risk questions to SDOH data collection
- Include screening in intake portion of visit

Patient Education

- 1:1 patient-provider engagement during visits
- Use EHR patient education for heat related illnesses and include in care plan
- Engage community health workers to spread information
- Ensure patient education is frequent and conducted in advance of extreme heat
- Get creative with message so motivational interviewing can guide the conversation
- Role plays and popular education
- Handout on discharge as standard practice
- Training at neighborhood level for preparedness and response
- Videos to play in waiting rooms
- Making strategies inclusive for individuals and to make sure people can understand graphics

Social Media and Communication Campaigns

- Develop a communication campaign linking climate change to extreme heat
- Leverage social media to target specific populations
- Use extreme heat preparedness as National Community Health Center Week theme
- Share information in health fairs and cooling centers

Organizational Communication Plans

- Identify an emergency contact at initial registration and during every visit. CHWs can be essential in facilitating these conversations
- Create an internal (providers/staff) and external (patients/community partners) communication plan addressing extreme heat

Health Center Staff Education

- All staff emails with educational information
- Use employee onboarding trainings and required annual trainings to educate staff on the issue.

Partnerships

- Develop one-pagers for heat risks for youth and partner with schools and athletic programs to disseminate
- Leverage existing lists of high-risk people. Ex: hurricane evacuation or electric company lists
- Engage pharmacists with patient information around high-risk medications and conditions

- Maintain inventory of cooling centers with addresses, telephone number, and hours
- Develop and maintain neighborhood contact lists
- Use EHR to help create patient teams--engage/educate patients on looking out for each other

Planning

- Use potential grants to engage impacted communities and have their voices be part of the planning process for heat and resilience
- Define barriers to implementing heat resilience planning
- Funding for home repair of cooling and adaptation

Regulatory

- Integrate extreme heat planning into the required CMS rules; health centers are required to do a risk assessment and should add extreme heat

General tips

- Consider that some people do not believe in climate change. Focus on plain language with an emphasis on weather as opposed to climate

Online Resources to Prepare and Understand Risk

Tool	Organization	Description	Link
CDC Climate Tracking & Health Program	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention	This program supports state, tribal, local and territorial public health agencies as they prepare for the health impacts of a changing climate.	Link to Program
CDC Heat and Health Tracker	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention	This tracker provides local heat and health information so communities can better prepare for and respond to extreme heat events.	Link to Tracker
Climate Resilience for Frontline Clinics Toolkit	Americares/Harvard C-CHANGE	This toolkit provides useful resources for health care providers, patients and administrators at free clinics and community health centers to meet the challenges for health care from climate change.	Link to Toolkit
Heat.gov	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration	This website serves as the premier source of heat and health information for the nation to reduce the health, economic, and infrastructural impacts of heat.	Link to Website
NOAA's Heat Risk Tool	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration	This tool provides a forecast risk of heat-related impacts to occur over a 24-hour period. This tool is meant to provide guidance for those decision makers and heat-sensitive populations who need to act.	Link to Tool
National Risk Index	Federal Emergency Management Agency	This map can be used to visualize the natural disaster risk across the country and combines multiple different factors with socioeconomic and built environment data to create a comprehensive understanding of risk.	Link to Map
NOAA's Weather and Climate Tool	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration	This tool provides the visualization and data export of weather and climate data and provides access to other web services to the National Centers for Environmental Information.	Link to Tool
Weather.gov	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration	This map demonstrates current weather updates across the country and provides information on if your area is at current risk for a storm or natural disaster.	Link to Map

Patient Communication Methods Before and During Emergencies

Communicating with patients is critical in helping mitigating health risks from extreme heat. Health centers should begin communications before extreme heat events and continue throughout the duration.

Before Extreme Heat

- Text messaging
- Messaging via EHR
- Conduct social media/marketing announcements about heat warnings and symptoms to watch for
- Share information in patient visits
- Share information through email
- Update health center's website with information

During Extreme Heat

- Leverage social media, mass emails, or texts
- Messaging via EHR
- Drive around in cooling van
- Work with news channels to do a "hot topic" discussion
- Work with local radio to share information
- Partner with other organizations such as cooling centers and food banks to share information

External Communications

Effective communication with external partners is essential to an effective response. Health centers should maintain communication lists with key partners and should be prepared to both receive and share critical information.

Key Partners

- Local health department
- Tribal health department
- State health department
- Healthcare coalitions
- Other health centers in community
- Local hospital(s)
 - Emergency departments
- Local emergency management
- State emergency management
- Utility companies
- Fire department
- EMS
- Local food bank
- Cooling centers
- Homeless coalition
- Community based organizations specifically addressing social isolation, living alone, disability, and/or provision of fans and cooling units
- Schools
- Churches
- Media

Types of Information Shared

- Projected duration of extreme heat
- Cooling Centers locations, status, and times
- Sharing needs/cooling needs of specific patients and/or communities
- After hour process once health centers are closed
- Health center capacity
- Health center capabilities - what can be managed, what to triage and redirect
- Health center status re: electricity, water, and other utilities
- Status of health system – ex: which hospitals on diversion, which health centers are open



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Participants

Nakia Abrams, DHA	Mona Lee, MA MBA
Iman Adem	Liz Makarra
Alejandra Alvarado, MPH	Cory Mccray
Lucinda Bazile, MPH	Samantha Oliver Mitchell, LCSW
Christina Brito- Tigerina, BS, LVN, CHWI	Ashley O'Brien
Sherrill Brown, MD	McKenna Parnes, PhD
Annie Carrell, PMHNP/APNP	Meghan Peck
Colleen Casey, DO	Laura Porter, PhD
Daniel DeJoseph, MD	Tiffany Priest, DPT
Julia DeJoseph	Lori Ritter
Alhan Fadiani, PharmD	Georgina Rivera-Singletary
George Garrow, MD	Miesha Shavers-Thomas, MA
Irma Gayosso	John Slater
Gabriella Gonzalez, MPA	Alinea Stevens, MD MPH
Cheryl Holder, MD	Melissa Toback, MSW MPH
Erica Hostetler	Arthi Vamsi, MBBS CPHQ
Sonya Howk, MPA	Gianna Van Winkle, MBA CHEP
Jenny Huynh, MPH	Maria Velasco, MA CCHW
Jeffrey Jones	Walt Vernon, PE MBA JD LLM
Erin Kelly, MPH	Jocelyn Vidales, MPH
Thomas J Krause, MPH MA CMPE	

Presenters

Caleb Dresser MD MPH Director of Healthcare Solutions, Harvard Chan Center for Climate, Health, and the Global Environment	Ambarish Vaidyanathan, PhD Senior Health Scientist, National Center for Environmental Health, CDC
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Liz Makarra
Director of Emergency Operations and Community Wellness, Waikiki Health

Laura Seeff, M.D.
Senior Medical Advisor, National Center for Environmental Health, CDC

Raymonde Uy, MD, MBA, ACHIP
Physician Informaticist, NACHC

Planning Team

Julia Dempsey, MPH	NACHC
Jessica Hinshaw, MPH	NACHC
Taina Lopez, MS	NACHC
Kristin Stevens, MS	Consultant