



Australian Government
Department of Health and Ageing

Directors of Nursing and Care Managers
Residential Aged Care Homes

Dear Directors of Nursing and Care Managers,

**IMPORTANT REMINDER FOR AGED CARE PROVIDERS IN HEAT WAVE
CONDITIONS**

It is predicted that we will experience heat wave conditions this summer and some states have already experienced very high temperatures. I would like to remind you of the impact that this weather may have on the older people in your care and the extra precautions and interventions in practice that may be needed.

When we experience long periods of unaccustomed high temperatures, residents are among those most at risk of heat-related illness.

Due to normal aged-related changes to the body, older people may not recognise that they are overheated and therefore may not complain about being hot or request additional fluids. To assist the comfort of residents and for you to meet the requirements of the *Aged Care Act 1997*, particularly Outcome 2 (Health and Personal Care) and Outcome 4 (Physical Environment and Safe System) of the Accreditation Standards you should:

- Ensure that the temperature in residents' rooms and within the facility is kept comfortable, keeping curtains and blinds closed to reduce the excess heat;
- Use portable air conditioners, coolers and fans if the building is not air-conditioned;
- Ensure small amounts of fluid is readily available, rather than large amounts of fluids less frequently;
- Offer residents alternative forms of fluid, such as jelly, ice-cream or fruit juice blocks and discourage alcoholic or caffeinated beverages;
- Provide residents with frequent small meals;
- Observe for signs of heat stress, such as nausea or change in appearance, such as red/pale or severely dry skin.
- A clinical assessment will be required if a resident shows signs of deterioration;
- Assist resident with use of sunscreen, keep skin covered when exposed to direct sunlight and wear loose fitting clothing;
- Offer tepid showers or sponging.

The effects of heat-related illnesses can range from mild conditions such as a rash or cramps to very serious conditions such as severe confusion or heat stroke. Heat may also worsen the condition of someone who already has a medical condition such as heart disease.

Review of Medicines

Some medicines are capable of increasing the risk of heat-associated illness in susceptible people. These include:

- Medicines that cause dehydration or electrolyte imbalance;
- Medicines likely to reduce renal function;
- Medicines that interfere with the production or regulation of heat.

It may be worth careful review of medication for these residents, assessing the risks and benefits of any changes to their regimen.

If you are concerned about a resident's well being, his or her medical practitioner should be immediately contacted.

Authorised for electronic transmission

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