



# Office of Mental Health

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To: OMH Facility, Clinical and Nursing Leaders, Directors of OMH Licensed Programs

From: Lloyd I. Sederer, M.D., Chief Medical Officer

Subject: Medical Alert – Increased Risk of Heat Illness to Persons Taking Antipsychotic Medications

Date: May 19, 2016

Hot summer temperatures have been associated with an increase in heat-related symptoms and even deaths. Pattern and trend reviews of OMH incident reports have confirmed these findings. **Individuals receiving antipsychotic medications are at particular risk of heat stroke and neuroleptic malignant syndrome (NMS) during periods of extreme heat, which is more likely in** poorly ventilated rooms. Children and the elderly are at increased risk. In addition to monitoring individuals at risk, including any people placed in seclusion or restraints during and after such episodes, **prevention** is paramount.

These conditions may best be prevented by:

- heightened attention to the state of hydration of patients, particularly those at high risk (those on antipsychotic medications, the elderly, children and those with poor fluid intake);
- helping high risk patients remain in cooler areas;
- monitoring patients for temperature elevations;
- avoiding direct exposure to sunlight or minimizing exposure;
- wearing protective clothing and using sunscreen;
- minimizing anticholinergic medications which may interfere with sweating; this includes switching to antipsychotics with less intrinsic anticholinergic activity and/or treating extrapyramidal side effects with amantadine instead of anticholinergics (such as benztropine or trihexyphenidyl).

For patients experiencing significant temperature elevations, where heat stroke or NMS are a consideration, antipsychotic medications should be held until the diagnosis is clear. If the diagnosis of NMS is confirmed, the antipsychotic medication must then be discontinued.

To order the brochures or posters fax your order to 315-735-5041 or e-mail the OMH Design Center and cc: Kristen LeClaire. Please include the item requested, the number of copies, and shipping address. If you would like to have a pdf file to print your own posters and brochures please visit the website at [www.omh.ny.gov/omhweb/pds/index.html](http://www.omh.ny.gov/omhweb/pds/index.html) and navigate the Online Catalogue using the category OMH publications and the key word Heat. Additional materials are available at <http://search.its.ny.gov/> using the key search words "heat illness brochure".

Please use the handouts to assist you and your staff in preventing and treating heat-related problems. Please ensure that these materials are widely circulated in your facilities and are discussed with patients and their families, in preparation for the hot weather ahead.

cc: Ann Sullivan, OMH Commissioner  
OMH Executive Team, Catherine Benham, Maxine Smalling, May Lum, Grace Lee, Matthew Perkins, Jay Carruthers, OMH Field Office Directors

