

Environment and Human Health, Inc.'s new publication calls for providing air-conditioning to the underserved

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The human body is not designed to handle excessive heat. If the body does not cool off, heat stroke may occur. Heat stroke can trigger seizures, convulsions, coma and at the worst, even death.”

William Petit, MD

(EHHI), a non-profit organization of physicians and public health professionals, is releasing its new publication, “The Dangers of Heat to the Elderly, the Very Young and Asthmatics.”

The publication explains how extreme heat episodes affect human health and specifically its dangers to vulnerable populations.

More people die from heat than any other extreme weather events. [An estimated 1,300 deaths per year in the United States](#) are due to extreme heat. [There are 6,512](#)

[emergency department visits and an average of 9,235 people](#) hospitalized in the U.S. from extreme heat.

William Petit, M.D. explained, “The human body is not designed to handle excessive heat. Our bodies work best within a temperature window of 97° to 99°F, depending on the individual. If the core body temperature goes higher, the body tries to get rid of excess heat, causing blood vessels to dilate. If the body does not cool off, heat stroke may occur allowing the body temperatures to climb as high as 104°F. Heat stroke can trigger seizures, convulsions or even a coma. Without treatment, death may follow,” continued Dr. Petit.

Who are the most vulnerable to heat episodes?

[Populations with lower incomes face 40% higher exposure to heat waves](#) than people with higher incomes. Poor neighborhoods and many neighborhoods of color tend to have less tree canopy coverage, more asphalt streets, and greater building density, all of which adds and retains heat. Population density contributes to higher temperatures as well, as more people in

one area means more body heat and more electricity use, which can raise temperatures. Some densely populated urban areas have been measured to be as much as 22°F hotter than suburban counterparts. The underserved are far less likely to own or use air conditioning because of cost barriers. This fact also puts them at great risk from extreme heat.

Hugh Taylor, M.D. Yale school of Medicine, explained why heat poses a special risk to asthmatics, "Hot weather aggravates asthma. Heat and humid conditions can lead to the constriction and narrowing of airways, which makes breathing difficult for people with asthma. During the summer months, the air can become stagnant. This situation traps unhealthy air that contains pollens, dust, mold, and often ozone as well as other pollutants. These are all asthma triggers and can cause an asthmatic additional breathing problems."

David Brown, Sc.D. Public Health Toxicologist explained, "The elderly are often considered the most vulnerable. They have fewer sweat glands, and their bodies respond more slowly to rising temperatures. Hotter days can make it difficult for the body to regulate temperature. This can be challenging for older adults, who typically do not adjust as well as others to sudden temperature changes. Older adults are also more likely to have chronic medical conditions that affect the body's response to temperature, or they may take prescription medicines that decrease their ability to control temperature. All this means that older adults are at higher risk for heat-related illnesses and death."

Pinar Kodaman, M.D., Ph.D. at the Yale School of Medicine explained, "Babies and children sweat less, reducing their ability to cool down, putting them at higher risk of overheating and developing heat-related illnesses. Infants and young children rely on others to keep them cool and hydrated when it is hot outside. Babies can easily get dehydrated in excessive heat. Removing the child from the heat will prevent a medical emergency."

The vulnerable populations and the underserved must be protected during extreme heat episodes.

Nancy Alderman, MES, President of EHHI gave EHHI's recommendations to get cooling agents to the underserved populations.

The underserved become vulnerable to heat episodes because many cannot afford either air conditioners, heat pumps/air conditioning pumps or any other cooling agents.

New York City has a Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) <<https://otda.ny.gov/programs/heap/>>, which is a federally funded program that provides financial assistance for the cost of air conditioning units or fans. However, New York found many never used their air conditioners because of utility bill costs were not included which is why it is so important to provide funds for the electricity costs as well.

The rest of the country must follow New York City's lead and get air-conditioning to the

underserved if we are to protect human health.

You can access our new publication at: <https://www.ehhi.org>

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