



STATE OF MARYLAND

DHMH

Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

Office of Health Care Quality

Spring Grove Center • Bland Bryant Building

55 Wade Avenue • Catonsville, Maryland 21228-4663

Martin O'Malley, Governor – Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor – John M. Colmers, Secretary

To: All Maryland licensed health care and residential facilities

From: Office of Health Care Quality

Date: July 7, 2010

RE: CODE RED – HEAT ALERT

The state of Maryland is currently under a high pressure system that is resulting in unprecedented heat wave with outdoor temperatures near or above 100°F. The Baltimore City Health Department has already issued a “Code Red Alert” cautioning residents to curtail outdoor activities. Regardless of what area of the state you are located, the heat may impact your operation. Therefore, all health care and residential facilities should implement measures to ensure the safety of their patients and residents during these extremely hot days. All facilities should consider doing the following to help reduce heat related incidents:

- Based on the projected temperatures for this week, air conditioning (AC) systems will be operating at their maximum limits for several days. Please have your maintenance staff check the AC systems and where needed, perform required preventive maintenance such as changing the filters, to keep the units operating at their optimal level. Have the telephone number of the company who services your AC readily available in the event of a system failure.
- Improve air circulation and efficiency by moving furniture or equipment that may be blocking floor and wall vents and returns to allow the unobstructed movement of air.
- Also, check the operation of all refrigeration units and ice makers particularly in facilities that do not have central air conditioning or where the kitchens are not air conditioned. Cleaning the condensers can help these units operate more efficiently. Regularly check the temperatures of refrigeration units to make sure that the units are continuing to maintain the required temperatures. Have the telephone number of the company that services the equipment readily available in the event of equipment failure.
- Make sure all medications are stored at the temperatures identified on the packaging or on the labels. Relocate to other secure storage if necessary.

- Make the facility more comfortable by closing curtains to keep out the hot sun. Avoid the use of heat producing equipment such as buffers and vacuums during the hot afternoons.
- Where it will not impact the safety of patients, residents, or staff; turn off unnecessary lights.
- To reduce the use of heat producing stoves and ovens, consider serving food items that do not require cooking.
- Make sure your residents and patients are offered cold water frequently and have it readily available for those who require it more often.
- Monitor and address the behaviors of confused patients or patients with dementia who may want to over-dress or wrap in blankets even in the hottest of weather.
- Move resident activities to areas of your facility that may be cooler such as a ground floor dining room or the activity room on the north side of the building.
- Offer patients or residents cool ice packs or cool wet washcloths to help sustain the heat.
- Give residents cool or lukewarm showers or baths.
- If needed, use properly guarded clean fans to help move the air.
- Very hot days can result in power outages. Make sure your emergency lighting is operable and that flashlights are available. For facilities with an emergency generator make sure you have enough fuel and that the generator is operational.
- If required do not hesitate to implement your emergency plans to deal with heat related problems.

If you require assistance from the staff of OHCQ, please contact 410-402-8015 and ask for your licensing coordinator.