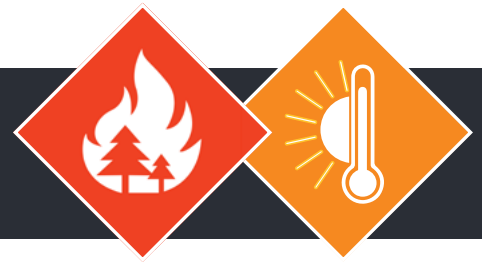


Managing the Patient Visit

Direct Care and Health Promotion



Focus: *Extreme weather safety education and information provided inside the facility.*

Every patient encounter is a critical window for intervention. During extreme heat or wildfire smoke events, patient encounters serve a dual purpose: 1) treating the immediate clinical need and 2) equipping the patient with the knowledge to stay safe once they leave the facility. Integrating extreme weather safety into the workflow helps protect health beyond the visit.

Effective patient education doesn't have to be time-consuming. By layering consistent messaging throughout the office visit—from the front desk to the exam room—staff can reinforce life-saving habits without disrupting usual protocols. When these interactions are standardized, they become a core part of the care plan, providing patients with the tangible tools and confidence they need to manage their health during extreme weather events.



At a glance:

- **Repeat health messages throughout the visit:** Ensure the core safety message is delivered at every touchpoint, from the reception desk to the provider exam.
- **Screen for extreme weather-related risks:** Utilize assessment tools that help providers identify if health issues are weather-related, or if patients are at high risk and require specific guidance or resources.
- **Tailor pre-made educational materials:** Utilize ready-made, visual materials like color-coded hydration charts or lobby screens that don't require high literacy levels to save staff capacity. Find resources in the [Climate Resilience for Frontline Clinics Toolkit](#).
- **Offer take-home tools:** Give out water, cooling rags or misters at the exit. Having a physical item helps the patient remember the health advice you gave them.

1 Repeat consistent health messaging throughout the visit.

Individual advice is easily forgotten when patients are overwhelmed by the heat. Facilities found that by reconfiguring their operations to enhance learning opportunities for patients, recollection improved. All staff, regardless of their role in the facility, are encouraged to communicate the same health message with patients at different points of contact during patient visits and community outreach.

Reaching patients every step of the way.

One facility reconfigured their workflow so that patients heard the same safety advice at every stage of their visit. The receptionist shared extreme heat alerts and hydration reminders at check-in, the lobby displayed messages in multiple languages and the provider gave personalized instructions for high-risk patients during the exam. Finally, as the patient left the clinic, they were given a heat kit containing a hydration kit, mister, cooling rag, sunscreen, lip balm and educational handouts. This repetition unified the staff's focus and significantly increased the likelihood that patients would take preventive actions.



Key takeaways:

- **Repeat the message:** Identify every point of contact (reception, provider, exit) to reinforce the same safety advice.
- **Be consistent:** Ensure every staff member gives the same core advice, such as reminding patients to hydrate even when not thirsty.
- **Provide physical tools that mitigate risk:** Distribute heat kits at the exit to anchor the educational messages patients received during their visit.

2 Screen for weather-related risks.

A patient's health is shaped by their environment (no air conditioning at home, work outdoors, etc.). Incorporating targeted assessment questions into the intake process or the clinical exam helps the team bridge the gap between the environment (e.g., weather) and the patient's actual exposure. By identifying these factors early, providers can more easily determine if symptoms like fatigue, headaches or respiratory distress are tied to extreme heat or wildfire smoke, even when the patient hasn't made that connection yet.



Connecting the dots through screening.

When clinical teams look beyond standard symptoms to a patient's environment, they can uncover risks that might otherwise go unnoticed. At one health center, providers updated their routine intake to include heat-health questions for patients with respiratory conditions. This small change in the workflow essentially turned staff into "health detectives" capable of spotting extreme weather-related triggers that the patient might not notice.

In one notable instance, a patient arrived at a facility convinced he was having a heart attack. However, because the staff was tuned in to the day's extreme temperatures, they quickly identified that his symptoms were actually signs of severe heat stroke. The value of this mindset often extends beyond the clinic too; one staff member used these same strategies to create a safety plan for their own family, noting, "It's important to have a plan for my family. I can't take care of others outside my home and not have a plan for them."



Key takeaways:

- **Update intake tools:** During high-risk seasons, add structured screening questions about a patient's daily exposure to extreme heat or wildfire smoke to intake forms like, "Do you work outdoors?" or "Do you have a reliable way to keep your home cool?"
- **Connect symptoms to weather threats:** If a patient has symptoms like fatigue or trouble breathing, you might ask about their daily routine and exposure patterns, for example, how their commute or home environment is affected by the current weather. This can help clarify if extreme heat or air quality is an underlying factor.
- **Prioritize vulnerable groups:** Focus these additional questions on patients with pre-existing conditions that are sensitive to heat or air quality.

3 Share pre-made educational materials.

Ready-made materials are most effective when they are adapted to the specific demographic a clinic or health center serves. Staff often lack the time to develop their own tools, so they find success by picking and choosing simple, visual messages from the [Climate Resilience for Frontline Clinics Toolkit](#) that align with their patients' literacy levels and daily habits. For example, some clinics and health centers found tools like hydration charts that use a color-coded urine scale useful because they provided a quick, visual reference that worked better for their population than complex text-heavy manuals.



Expanding education for chronic conditions.

One health center was surprised to learn that the [Climate Resilience for Frontline Clinics Toolkit](#) included [care for patients with chronic conditions](#), having previously assumed such efforts were only necessary after an acute emergency. As they said, “We thought it was only after an emergency. We now have educational information on screens that patients can see, and QR codes that patients can use. We work with community groups and *promotoras* (health promoters) and the food bank.” This shift allowed the facility to provide continuous support and preventative education through trusted local channels.



Key takeaways:

- **Use pre-developed materials to save capacity:** Don’t start from scratch; use the [Climate Resilience for Frontline Clinics Toolkit](#) for ready-to-use materials so your team can focus its energy on “how” and “where” to reach patients.

4 Offer take-home tools.

Education is more effective when paired with a tangible item. Link advice to a physical object if you can.

When educating others about heat and health, consider sharing items such as:

- Water bottles
- Handheld misters
- Cooling towels
- Electrolyte packets*
- Sunscreen

When educating others about wildfire smoke and health, consider sharing items such as:

- N95 masks
- Air purifiers
- DIY air filter supplies (box fan and MERV-14 rated filters)

**Not needed for everyone*

Take-home resources function as a reinforcement tool extending the impact of clinical counseling beyond the point of care.



Key takeaways:

- **Keep kits simple and adaptable to local conditions.**
- **Use distribution as an engagement moment:** Staff can reinforce safety messages during handoff.
- **Pair advice with an object:** Physical items reinforce advice and increase message retention.

Summary checklist for clinics or health centers

- Information hub:** Do you have a central place (digital or physical) for real-time updates that all staff can access?
- Staff conversations:** Have you given the team (including volunteers) a quick refresher or simple checklist on which health symptoms to look for when extreme heat or wildfire smoke hits?
- Patient-ready handouts:** Do you have 2–3 specific visual handouts or digital links (QR codes) ready to share with patients that match their literacy levels, language preferences and channel preferences before or during extreme weather events?
- Patient kits:** Are your hydration and cooling supplies stocked and ready for distribution at the exit?