

Staying cool is important in summer weather

When summer temperatures rise, caregivers at nursing facilities and other long-term care facilities are more alert than ever for the comfort and well-being of their residents and clients.

Although any one at any time can suffer from heat-related illness, some people – including the elderly – are at greater risk than others.

The federal Centers for Disease Control says people 65 years of age or older may not compensate for heat stress efficiently and are less likely to sense and respond to change in temperature.

Elderly people are more prone to heat stress than younger people for several reasons:

- Elderly people do not adjust as well as young people to sudden changes in temperature.
- They are more likely to have a chronic medical condition that upsets normal body responses to heat.
- They are more likely to take prescription medicines that impair the body's ability to regulate its temperature or that inhibit perspiration.

In addition, people who are physically ill – especially with heart disease or high-blood pressure or who take certain medications, such as for depression, insomnia or poor circulation – may be affected by extreme heat.

The solution is usually simple and direct. During hot weather, caregivers make frequent rounds offering residents and clients extra beverages to keep them hydrated.

The elderly and people on certain medications may be especially affected by extreme heat

At CAHF member Brookside Skilled Nursing in San Mateo, for example, “T-time!” is announced every two hours when the temperature is over 80 degrees, and everyone in the facility – visiting family members and staff as well as residents – is reminded to drink extra fluids.

As a treat for everyone, “fun water,” such as Popsicles or watermelon, is given out at 2 p.m. each afternoon.

Another CAHF member facility found a fun way to help beat the heat on one especially warm day by distributing toy water pistols to residents, many of them in wheelchairs, who made a cooling game out of squirting each other.

Families and friends can help by encouraging their loved ones to drink up even if they don't feel thirsty.

If you're taking a loved one on an outing away from the facility in hot weather, take extra precautions to stay cool. Need advice? Ask the facility administrator or other caregiver.

Inside

- Medi-Cal recipients required to prove citizenship
- Help for people who have difficulty using phones
- Health-care resources online

New federal rule: **Medi-Cal recipients must prove citizenship**

Caregivers were alarmed when the federal government announced a new regulation, effective July 1, that requires Medicaid (Medi-Cal) beneficiaries to prove they are U.S. citizens.

The concern on the part of long-term care providers was not whether Medicaid recipients should be citizens – that has been a requirement of Medicaid since the program was formed decades ago.

Instead, what concerned the long-term care community is that many elderly Americans are not necessarily able to provide documentation proving they are citizens.

The federal government issued a long, complicated list of citizenship documentation that would be accepted. But that did not solve the problem.

“Sadly, there are very infirm nursing-facility residents who have no family and who lack simple things like birth certificates and driver licenses,” said Betsy Hite, director of public affairs for CAHF, the California Association of Health Facilities. “How are they supposed to prove they are U.S. citizens?”

As Stan Rosenstein, deputy director of the California Department of Health Services (DHS), told a reporter from *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, “Someone with Alzheimer’s in a nursing facility [could] need assistance verifying citizenship.”

In fact, DHS has told the federal government it could take weeks before the state of California is prepared to start enforcing the law.

DHS Director Sandra Shewry said that, among other things, social-service workers in California’s 58 counties will have to be trained to meet the new requirement.

While Medicaid always has required applicants to affirm their citizenship or legal residency for full benefits, until now they simply had to check a box on a form. Local eligibility workers are supposed to verify the information, but in many states they don’t.

In Washington, D.C., last month, CAHF and its national affiliate, the American Health Care Association, appealed to Michael Leavitt, U.S. secretary of health and human services, to consider exempting long-term care residents from the new rule, arguing that for these people the burden of providing additional documentation would be great.

“Clearly, the secretary heard our requests,” said AHCA President Bruce Yarwood.

A week after the regulation took effect, the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services – known as CMS – issued new rules easing the requirement for people in long-term care such as residents of nursing facilities and clients in group homes for people with developmental disabilities.

Some two-thirds of nursing-facility residents and virtually all clients at group homes for the developmentally disabled are Medi-Cal (Medicaid) recipients, so many people are affected by the rule.

Meanwhile, here in California, legislation provides that Medi-Cal will cover long-term care services if a resident is otherwise eligible for Medi-Cal but cannot prove citizenship. And state officials said the process for applying for Medi-Cal and renewing participation in the program will remain as it is now until sensible procedures for verifying citizenship can be worked out.

CAHF and other caregiver and health-care advocacy organizations are closely watching how the new regulation is being implemented and will continue to work with the state and federal governments to assist residents and clients while honoring the law.

The proof-of-citizenship requirement is a provision of the federal Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) of 2006.

We want to hear from you

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State program has help for people with difficulty using phones

Do you or does someone you know have difficulty using the phone?

The California Telephone Access Program (CTAP) provides free phone equipment and services to qualified people who have hearing, visual, speech, cognitive or mobility difficulties using the telephone.

To qualify, you must reside in California, have phone service in your home and must be certified by a medical doctor or other authorized agent listed in the CTAP brochure as having a permanent or temporary impairment.

Other free services available are the California Relay Service (CRS), which allows people with hearing loss or a speech disability to communicate by text telephone (TTY) to others with a standard phone.

The Speech to Speech (STS) Relay Service enables people with speech disabilities to communicate by phone. These services also work in reverse for people wanting to contact a hearing or speech disabled person by phone. All of these services are available at no charge.

For a free presentation for you or your family member, contact Love Miller, CTAP outreach specialist, by phone at (916) 927-0516, by fax at (916) 927-1150 or by e-mail at love@ddtp.org.

You may also call (800) 995-6831, voice/TTY, or visit the Web site at www.ddtp.org.

CTAP is a California state mandated program under governance of the California Public Utilities Commission.

Finding help online

In this age of the Internet, more and more information is available online.

The federal Administration on Aging (with its own Web site at www.aoa.dhhs.gov) reminds consumers of these online resources, designed to help you locate information and assistance on a variety of issues at the federal, state and local levels.

- www.firstgov.gov – The official U.S. gateway to all government information.
- www.ssa.gov – The Web site of the Social Security Administration, also with information about Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits.
- www.medicare.gov – Link to information on Medicare.
- www.va.gov – Programs and services offered by the U.S. Veterans Administration.
- www.medicare.gov/NHCompare – Nursing Home Compare, detailed information about the performance of every Medicare- and Medicaid-certified nursing facility in the country.
- www.lep.gov – Essential information on guidance and resources for recipients of federal financial assistance dealing with individuals with limited English proficiency.

- www.hhs.gov/ocr/hipaa – Provides essential information about protection of the privacy of personal health information.
- www.DisabilityInfo.gov – The comprehensive federal Web site of disability-related government resources.

Clinic-based physical therapy more successful for osteoarthritis

A recent study published in *Physical Therapy*, the journal of APTA, the American Physical Therapy Association, determined that clinic-based physical-therapy programs are more successful than home-based physical therapy for patients with osteoarthritis.

The study showed that both treatments can be beneficial, but manual therapy applied by physical therapists, or “PTs,” combined with PT-supervised exercises made patients less likely to be on medication one year later.

The study consisted of 134 patients who underwent one of the two treatments over a four-week period. Patients undergoing clinical treatment showed a 52-percent improvement rate, while home-based patients saw only a 26-percent improvement. **Source:** Coastal Physical Therapy, Loma Linda



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Thanks again to 'electronic' Families & Friends

We here at the California Association of Health Facilities can't seem to say it too often: Thanks again to those of you who are willing – and able – to receive the *Families & Friends Bulletin* electronically.

From its start back about 1997 with just a few hundred readers, CAHF's Families & Friends program has grown so rapidly in recent years that we don't quite know how to cope with our own success.

We now mail nearly 9,000 copies of the *Bulletin* every other month – and that's in addition to the countless "hits" we receive for the Internet version of the newsletter at www.cahf.org.

Encouraging readers to make use of the online *Families & Friends Bulletin* not only makes it easier for us to reach consumers, it also points up the ever-growing value of the Internet as a source for health-care information.

Virtually every edition of the *Bulletin* includes references to useful health-related Web sites (see Page 3 for a list of Internet links from the federal Administration on Aging.) And studies are showing that, once they get the hang of it, senior citizens find the Internet and e-mail useful and convenient.

And for people with Internet access, there's nothing easier than getting the *Families & Friends Bulletin* online. Just go www.cahf.org and click on "Families & Friends."

You'll find easy-to-read online versions of the newsletter going back to 2004 – and there's no waiting for the new edition to arrive in the mail. We'll even send you an e-mail when the latest newsletter is posted.

To be transferred from the hard-copy mailing list to the e-mail list of Families & Friends, just send an e-mail to dross@cahf.org. Thanks.