



FARMWORKER APPRECIATION DAY FACTSHEET

The Secretary's Initiative on Protecting Farmworkers from Extreme Heat and Wildfire Smoke

This Farmworker Appreciation Day, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) honors the important work of farmworkers, shares actions to better protect their health, and commits to continue building on this progress.

On March 7, 2024, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Xavier Becerra launched the Initiative on Protecting Farmworkers from Extreme Heat and Wildfire Smoke to address the growing threat of heat and smoke for farmworkers. The Initiative complements work to protect outdoor workers from across the Administration, including the Department of Labor's recent **Notice of Proposed Rulemaking** for Heat Injury and Illness Prevention in Outdoor and Indoor Work Settings. This proposed rule is a significant step toward a federal heat standard to protect workers made possible by research from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Key accomplishments from the Secretary's Initiative on Protecting Farmworkers from Extreme Heat and Wildfire Smoke encompass work from eight HHS operating and staff divisions across twelve areas of work, ranging from translation of key materials into languages spoken by farmworkers to workplace health hazard evaluations to evidence-based recommendations for clinicians. Following are highlights of the Initiative's work.

➤ Improving Access to Health Hazard Evaluations

The CDC National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) will investigate workplace health hazards for free when requested by an employer, union, or three or more employees. NIOSH and the HHS Office of Minority Health have expanded the languages the **Health Hazard Evaluation request form** is available in, from English and Spanish, to also include Mixteco, Arabic, Chinese, Vietnamese, Tagalog, and Haitian Creole. NIOSH is also conducting outreach to farmworker-serving organizations and working with its **Centers for Agricultural Safety and Health** to raise awareness of the Health Hazard Evaluation program. The twelve Centers for Agricultural Safety and Health are funded by NIOSH to conduct research and outreach to protect farmworkers from occupational injuries and illnesses. The Centers have released a series of **heat-related videos** and are conducting research and developing tools to prevent heat and wildfire smoke exposure.



◊ Evidence-Based Recommendations to Better Protect Workers

NIOSH is also developing a hazard review document that summarizes the scientific literature on the health effects from exposures to wildland fire smoke and provides recommendations to protect outdoor workers. This document is expected to be released fall of 2024 and will serve as the basis for future recommendations. NIOSH's existing Criteria for a Recommended Standard on Occupational Exposure to Heat and Hot Environments informed the Department of Labor's recent **Notice of Proposed Rulemaking** for Heat Injury and Illness Prevention in Outdoor and Indoor Work Settings.

◊ Supporting Use of the Medical Reserve Corps to Care for Farmworkers and Staff Cooling Centers

The Administration for Strategic Preparedness & Response (ASPR) is providing technical assistance to inform local Medical Reserve Corps units on how they may bring care to farmworkers at their workplaces. ASPR has also partnered with the Administration for Children & Families (ACF) to raise awareness of the Medical Reserve Corps as a state resource that can help staff cooling centers. ASPR also promotes extreme heat and wildfire resources and tools through its **Technical Resources, Assistance Center, and Information Exchange (TRACIE)**.

◊ Educational Resources for Migrant Health Centers on Heat and Smoke

The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) provides funding for 175 Migrant Health Centers serving about 1 million people per year. HRSA also funds national training and technical assistance partners to support these health centers. Two national training and technical assistance partners, Migrant Clinicians Network and Farmworker Justice, conducted a **webinar** for clinicians and health center staff to learn more about wildfires and wildfire preparedness for migratory and seasonal agricultural workers communities in June. They also created a **clinician's guide on heat-related illness**. The National Institutes of Health National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) has also **funded the Migrant Clinicians Network** to train community health centers in Puerto Rico on emergency preparedness and response to extreme weather events, including heat waves. To further support health care providers responding to extreme heat, the CDC recently published a **Quick Start Guide for Clinicians on Heat and Health**.

◊ Heat Stress Prevention Training and Tools

HHS provides trainings and tools for employers, workers, and the public to understand and prevent heat-related illness. The NIEHS Worker Training Program recently published a **Heat Stress Prevention Training Program** in English and Spanish designed to reduce the risk of heat stress for workers in indoor and outdoor environments. NIEHS is conducting outreach to farmworker communities to share this resource. For example, NIEHS grant recipient Western Region University Consortium creating a series of **video clips** to inform workers in California about heat illness prevention in languages from peoples indigenous to Mexico and Central America. For real-time information about the risk of heat-related illness, the **OSHA-NIOSH Heat Safety app** is available to assist users in planning outdoor work activities based on how hot it feels throughout the day. The app is available in both English and Spanish and has been downloaded over 2.5 million times. The CDC and Office of Climate Change and Health Equity (OCCHE) also created a **Heat and Health Index (HHI)** to help identify communities where people are most likely to feel the effects of heat on their health. OCCHE also features information on how public health professionals can support farmworkers in the **Climate and Health Outlook**.



🔗 **Guidance on Wildfire and Heat Stress Flexibilities and Resources**

ACF **issued guidance** on using Community Service Block Grant (CSBG) and Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) funds to protect vulnerable communities from wildfire smoke and extreme heat. LIHEAP and CSBG can be utilized by grant recipients to provide assistance to vulnerable households, including farmworkers. LIHEAP can provide cooling assistance, access to cooling centers, and or cooling system repair and replacement. CSBG lead agencies have the flexibility to tailor services to be responsive during extreme heat and wildfire situations, including disseminating work supplies such as protective gear before or during a crisis. This guidance builds on extreme heat guidance for **CSBG** and **LIHEAP** issued in 2022. The LIHEAP Extreme Heat dashboard and **Disaster Flexibilities Hub** provide additional resources and information for grant recipients.

🔗 **Protecting the Civil Rights of Farmworkers**

The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) **published a factsheet** for farmworkers and advocates explaining protections against discrimination in healthcare programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including sexual orientation and gender identity), age, or disability in any health program or activity that receive federal financial assistance, state-based health insurance exchanges, and HHS health programs and activities. OCR will also provide information on the obligation of these entities to provide language assistance for those with limited English proficiency free of charge.

🔗 **Supporting Migrant Health Center Resilience**

At the National Advisory Council on Migrant Health's May meeting, the Council expressed interest in understanding how migrant health centers can access Inflation Reduction Act funds for energy efficient, sustainable, and resilient infrastructure. In response to feedback from HRSA national training and technical assistance partners on what resources would be most helpful, OCCHE developed a **short guide** to how Migrant Health Centers can use the Inflation Reduction Act to reduce operating expenses and improve resilience. HRSA has also **published a story** recognizing Vista Community Clinic's excellent work to prepare the local migratory and seasonal agricultural worker community for wildfire events.

🔗 **Studying Heat and Wildfire Smoke-Related Illness**

NIEHS supports about 40 projects totaling more than \$19M studying the health impacts of wildfire smoke exposure. NIEHS is also field testing an all-in-one, wearable multi-sensor bio patch that is capable of monitoring various physiological parameters of heat exposure to better identify when workers are experiencing heat-related illness. NIH also funds and oversees the **Chronic Kidney Disease of Uncertain Etiology (CKDu) in Agricultural Communities (CURE) Research Consortium**, an international collaborative research effort to understand the causes of CKDu and risk factors for disease progression, including heat, agrochemicals, and other exposures among individuals living and working in CKDu-endemic agricultural communities.



➤ **Transparent Heat-Related Illness Data**

To help the public better understand the health burden of extreme heat for workers, the Heat and Worker Health map, located on CDC's [Heat and Health Tracker](#) website under the Heat Burden section, includes the rate of work-related injuries and illnesses due to heat per 10,000 full-time workers by state for the selected year.

➤ **Supporting Seasonal and Migrant Farmworkers Mental Health**

The current issue of the SAMSHA Disaster Technical Assistance Center *Dialogue* is focused on Disaster Behavioral Health and Rural Populations. It includes an article by Florida State University's Dr. Javier Rosado which examines the behavioral health implications and impacts of extreme heat and wildfires on seasonal and migrant farmworkers. This article is intended to raise awareness for clinicians and responders serving seasonal and migrant farmworker populations.

➤ **Funding Opportunity for New Care Sites**

HRSA has opened a [New Access Points funding opportunity](#) to support new health center service delivery sites to expand affordable, accessible, and high-quality primary health care for underserved communities and populations. HRSA has promoted this funding opportunity with resources and technical assistance in Spanish, including FAQ sessions with live Spanish interpretation, and an [FAQs webpage](#).

➤ **Other Efforts for Farmworkers**

While this factsheet focuses on the hazards of extreme heat and wildfire smoke, HHS is also leading important work in response to the outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza A (H5N1) virus in dairy cattle in order to protect farmworker health. CDC issued [guidance for farmworkers working around animals](#) to reduce their risk of infection with avian influenza and is working with partners to reach affected workers and employers. CDC is also conducting outreach to farmworkers in affected counties through social media, digital display, and audio media and more broadly through partner organizations, to share information about potential risks of avian influenza A (H5N1) infection, recommended preventive actions, symptoms to be on the look-out for, and what to do if they develop symptoms. As part of ASPR's commitment to protecting workers who may encounter animals infected with H5N1, the Strategic National Stockpile has fulfilled requests from 10 states and provided approximately two million pieces of personal protective equipment to protect farmworkers from the current outbreak.

Protecting the health and wellbeing of our nation's farmworkers, particularly as extreme heat and wildfire events grow more frequent and severe, is at the core of HHS' mission. HHS appreciates the input from experts and advocates that continues to guide this Initiative, including feedback from the [National Advisory Council on Migrant Health](#) and [Centers for Agricultural Safety and Health](#). HHS is committed to deepening and expanding this work in the months and years ahead.

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