

HEALTH IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE: EXTREME HEAT

Heat is one of the leading weather-related killers. Warmer average temperatures and hotter days are leading to longer and more severe heat waves. As heat increases, body temperature and heart rate rise, resulting in severe health problems such as dehydration, heat stress, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke as the body is overwhelmed by heat. Extreme heat can also amplify the risk of cardiovascular, respiratory, and cerebrovascular diseases.

Heat is also a significant contributing factor in creating ground-level ozone, a serious health hazard. Ground-level ozone reduces lung function and inflames the linings of our lungs.

Approximately

300,000

people living in North Carolina are especially vulnerable to extreme heat.

Though urban areas are traditionally considered more susceptible to extreme heat issues, heat-related illnesses in North Carolina are most common in rural areas for the following reasons:

- Outdoor occupational labor is more common in rural areas, with higher concentrations of residents working in agriculture and construction than in urban locations
- Many rural residents cannot afford proper air conditioning
- Rural locations experience greater overall social vulnerability, putting them at higher risk for natural hazards such as extreme heat

Populations most likely to be impacted by extreme heat:

- Young children
- Pregnant women
- Outdoor workers
- Student athletes
- Homeless people
- The elderly
- And people with certain medical conditions

The number of extreme heat days is expected to increase in the coming years.

By 2050, approximately 20% of the year, or about 70 days, are expected to have temperatures above

105°

In 2000, North Carolina experienced only 14 days at this temperature.

