

# Extreme heat linked to climate change may adversely affect pregnancy

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Pregnant women are an important but thus far largely overlooked group vulnerable to the effects of extreme heat linked to climate change, according to new research by Sabrina McCormick, PhD, an Associate

Professor of Environmental and Occupational Health at Milken Institute School of Public Health at the George Washington University.

"Expecting mothers are an important group whose unique vulnerability to heat stress should be factored into [public health](#) policy," says McCormick, who has been studying the impacts of [climate change](#) on human health for over a decade, and served as the lead author on the Special Assessment of the Nobel Prize-winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. "Exposure to extreme heat can harm both pregnant mothers and their babies, especially in situations where the expectant mother has limited access to prenatal care."

McCormick and Leeann Kuehn, a recent GW MPH alumna concurrently studying to be a physician's assistant, conducted the most extensive systematic review to date of research articles that identify how heat-related exposures result in adverse health effects for pregnant women. They followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guide to identify and systematically review articles from PubMed and *Cochrane Reviews* on climate change-related exposures and [adverse health effects](#) for [pregnant women](#).

The studies that McCormick and Kuehn identified provide evidence that exposure to temperature extremes can adversely impact birth outcomes, including changes in length of gestation, birth weight, stillbirth, and neonatal stress during unusually hot temperatures.

"Our study indicates that there is a need for further research on the ways that climate change, and heat in particular, affect maternal health and neonatal outcomes," McCormick says. "The research also shows that uniform standards for assessing the effects of heat on maternal fetal health need to be established."

"Heat Exposure and Maternal Health in the Face of Climate Change" is

published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*.

**More information:** Leeann Kuehn et al. Heat Exposure and Maternal Health in the Face of Climate Change, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2017). [DOI: 10.3390/ijerph14080853](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph14080853)

Provided by George Washington University

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