

# Heatwave of summer 2022 forced surgery cancellations in one-fifth of UK hospitals

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The 2022 summer heatwave resulted in a fifth of UK hospitals being forced to cancel operations during the three days when temperatures soared, a new study reveals.

The GreenSurg Collaborative, led by researchers at the University of Birmingham, published their findings in a letter to *British Journal of Surgery*.

Had the high temperatures continued, a further third of hospitals would have had to cancel [surgery](#), as NHS buildings are not set up to withstand dangerously high temperatures.

The team surveyed surgeons, anesthetists, and critical care doctors working during the [heatwave](#) of 16-19 July 2022.

They received 271 responses from 140 UK hospitals with one in five respondents (18.5%) reporting the heatwave resulted in elective surgery being canceled. A further third (35.1%) anticipated that cancellations would have been likely had the heatwave continued.

Factors contributing to heatwave-related cancellations included staff shortages (35.8% of respondents), unsafe operating theater environments (30.3%), and bed shortages (22.1%).

Surgical services were poorly prepared for heatwaves with [ambient temperature](#) uncontrollable in 41.0% of operating theaters. Most hospitals that responded (85%) lacked "summer pressure" plans to maintain elective surgical safety and capacity. Over a third of respondents (35.4%) reported making adaptations to maintain the routine surgical activity during the heatwave.

Co-author James Glasbey, NIHR Doctoral Research Fellow in Global Surgery at the University of Birmingham, commented, "Even short heatwaves may result in widespread disruption to [surgical services](#) in the UK. The likelihood of extreme weather events is growing—we could find ourselves in both a 'winter' and 'summer' stress situation within the next few years.

"As hospitals tackle post-COVID surgery backlogs, they must consider how to safeguard against further climate change-related disruption to the delivery of surgical services. This should be included in the preparation of 'summer pressure' plans to improve the resilience of [elective surgery](#) services."

The researchers discovered that hospitals adopted several strategies during the heatwave to cushion the impact of rising temperatures on [surgical patients](#). These included delayed discharge of high-risk patients, changes to surgical teams, selecting lower risk patients to have surgery, and restricting surgical activity to day-cases.

Some hospitals also introduced longer staff breaks, gave extra fluids to patients admitted, and started surgeries earlier in the morning when temperatures were lower.

Provided by University of Birmingham

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