

# Rising number of Americans sent to ERs last year during heat waves

April 18 2024, by Ernie Mundell

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As climate change threatens another long hot summer for Americans, new data shows last summer's record-breaking temperatures sent a rising number of people to emergency departments. The findings are [published](#) in the journal *MMWR. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*.

At special risk of heatstroke and other heat-related issues: Working-age Americans, who often found themselves far from air conditioning when triple-digit temperatures struck.

"Heat-related illness will continue to be a significant public health concern as climate change results in longer, hotter and more frequent episodes of [extreme heat](#)," said a team led by Ambarish Vaidyanathan, a researcher at the National Center for Environmental Health, part of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In the study, the CDC team used federal health care data to compare [emergency department](#) (ED) visits for [heat-related illnesses](#) during May–September 2023 to rates observed from 2018 through 2022.

"The warm-season months [May–September] of 2023 were the hottest ever recorded in the United States," Vaidyanathan's group noted.

According to the data, July and August of last year were particularly brutal in terms of heat. During those two months, 303 of every 100,000 ED visits nationwide were linked to overheating, compared 97 out of 100,000 for May, June and September.

Heat-related illness visits to emergency departments "peaked in several regions and remained elevated for a prolonged duration," the researchers said.

Men were more likely to be overcome by heat than women, with more than 2.5 times the rate of ER admissions, the report found. Much of that might be due to the fact that working-age men are more likely to be working outside or in areas without air conditioning.

Indeed, working-age folk (people ages 18 to 54) had especially high risks for an ED visit for a heat-related illness, the CDC team found.

"Frontline essential workers tending to emergencies, such as firefighters, might be at particularly high risk for exposure to heat stress," the report's authors added.

Certain areas were hit hardest. In the region comprising Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Texas, ED admissions for heat-related illnesses in 2023 exceeded those of prior years on more than a third (37%) of summer days, the study found.

"Even in areas with high rates of air conditioning, such as the South and southeastern United States, persons exposed to extreme heat might have limited or no access to cooling spaces," the researchers wrote.

High energy costs might prevent some folk from affording air conditioning, they said, and extreme heat can also raise the odds for power grid outages.

Overall, "the record-breaking temperatures of the 2023 warm-weather season had substantial public health impact, and this trend might increase in the coming years because of [climate change](#)," the CDC team noted.

**More information:** Find out more about how to protect yourself from extreme heat at the federal government's [ready.gov](#).

Ambarish Vaidyanathan et al, Heat-Related Emergency Department

Visits — United States, May–September 2023, *MMWR. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* (2024). [DOI: 10.15585/mmwr.mm7315a1](https://doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7315a1)

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