LANCET COUNTDOWN: HEALTH AND CLIMATE CHANGE SMALL ISLAND DEVELOPING STATES

NEW CALEDONIA

LANCET COUNTDOWN ON HEALTH AND CLIMATE CHANGE
DATA SHEET 2025

Health and climate change in New Caledonia

The Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change tracks the evolving relationship between climate and health through 50+ peer-reviewed indicators. Since 2016, it has provided peer-reviewed annual assessments, published in *The Lancet*. The 2025 report reveals the grave health toll of climate change inaction: fossil fuel dependence, rising emissions, and delayed adaptation are costing millions of lives. Recent climate policy rollbacks further threaten our ability to respond to the accelerating crisis, undermining progress towards a healthy future.

This document highlights key country-level findings from the 2025 Lancet Countdown report for New Caledonia, showing that:

In New Caledonia, populations are increasingly exposed to extreme heat, contributing to rising cases of heat-related illness and mortality, and undermining livelihoods and wellbeing.

Droughts and sea level rise are amplifying extreme weather risks in New Caledonia, increasing vulnerability to cyclones, flooding, and heatwaves.

Globally comparable data for many climate-health indicators are currently unavailable for New Caledonia. Strengthening national data collection and monitoring systems would support the development of locally relevant, health-promoting climate policies.

With the threats of climate change growing, protecting people's health and survival demands simultaneous and unprecedented efforts to advance adaptation and mitigation, and requires an "all hands on deck" approach.

Heat and Health

Exposure to high temperatures threatens lives and health, increasing the risk of heat-related illness and mortality. Vulnerable groups, including older adults, young children, pregnant women, and those with pre-existing conditions, face the greatest risks. In New Caledonia, heatwave exposure has risen above global averages, placing growing pressure on health systems.

TREE COVER LOSS

Loss of tree cover reduces shade and evapotranspiration, intensifying urban heat and increasing exposure to extreme temperatures.

As of 2023, almost 30,000 hectares of tree cover have been lost since 2000. (Indicator 3.4)

In 2024, people in New Caledonia were exposed to 9.38 heatwave days each, on average. Of these, 9.37 (99.9%) would not have been expected to occur without climate change. (Indicator 1.1.1)

Rising temperatures also threaten the health benefits associated with outdoor physical activity. In 2024, individuals experienced over 213 more hours per person during which ambient heat would have posed a moderate or higher risk of heat stress if undertaking moderate outdoor physical activity (e.g., running), relative to the 1990–1999 baseline average. (Indicator 1.1.2)

2.9M

From 2025-2024, heat exposure resulted in a loss of approximately 2.9 million potential labour hours per year. Construction accounted for the highest losses at 65%, while the service sector saw the largest increase, 2.4 times more losses per year in 2015–2024 compared to 1990–1999. (Indicator 1.1.3)

The potential income lost from labour capacity reduction due to extreme heat was US$14.7 billion in 2024 in the SIDS region. Workers in the agricultural and construction sectors were severely affected, incurring 31% and 32% of the respective losses in 2024. (Indicator 4.1.3)

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Extreme Weather Events

Droughts in New Caledonia are becoming more frequent and severe due to rising temperatures, which increase evaporation and reduce freshwater availability, contributing to extreme heat and dry conditions. Sea level rise is intensifying coastal flooding and storm surges, making New Caledonia more vulnerable to cyclones and heavy rainfall events linked to climate change.

In 2024, the entire land area of New Caledonia experienced at least 3 months of extreme drought. (Indicator 1.2.1) This prolonged drought period signals severe water stress, threatening agriculture, ecosystems, and access to safe drinking water, while increasing the risk of wildfires and food insecurity.

In 2024, 11,103 people were living less than 1m above sea level in New Caledonia. (Indicator 2.3.3) This low-lying population faces heightened exposure to coastal flooding, storm surges, and sea level rise - risks that are intensifying with more frequent and severe extreme weather events driven by climate change.

Data Scarcity and Importance of Local Data Sources

Low data availability is one of the key challenges in measuring and monitoring climate change and health impacts in Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Global datasets, particularly gridded satellite monitored data, are often of too coarse resolution for small countries, and can therefore not be used. Many modelling models, such as for greenhouse gas emissions, are also often not suitable to run over very small areas, further limiting the available data. For a large proportion of indicators in the 2024 SIDS regional report (39 out of 59), data was available for some of the larger islands but only 13 had suitable data for over 30% of the countries in this region. This was true for both modelled and reported data, highlighting both technical limitations but also a lack of monitoring and reporting to international organisations such as the World Health Organisation (WHO).

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