LANCET COUNTDOWN: TRACKING PROGRESS ON HEALTH AND CLIMATE CHANGE
In collaboration with Wellcome

A decade tracking progress on health and climate change

NEW ZEALAND

LANCET COUNTDOWN ON HEALTH AND CLIMATE CHANGE
DATA SHEET 2026

Health and Climate Change in New Zealand

The Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change tracks the connections between health and climate change. Its 2026 report marks the 10th annual assessment of the Lancet Countdown. The report unveils new global findings across more than 50-peer reviewed indicators, revealing that health impacts have accelerated in the decade since the Paris Agreement came into force, compared to the decade prior. A bold new approach is required to protect health.

This document presents key country-level findings from the 2026 Report of the Lancet Countdown and the 2026 Lancet Countdown Oceania Report, showing that:

Increasing heat exposure is affecting vulnerable populations in New Zealand, disrupting sleep, limiting safe physical activity and reducing labour capacity, with consequences for health and livelihoods.

Extreme drought has become more widespread in New Zealand, posing risks to water availability, food production and livelihoods. Rising coastal temperatures and exposure to sea-level rise present additional risks to coastal communities and marine food security.

Air pollution continues to contribute to premature mortality in New Zealand. Expanding household and road transport electrification powered by renewable electricity can reduce harmful air pollution and protect health.

Excessive consumption of red meat, processed meat and dairy contributes to diet-related mortality in New Zealand, while these products account for a substantial share of food consumption-related greenhouse gas emissions. Healthier dietary patterns can benefit both health and the climate.

Heat and Health

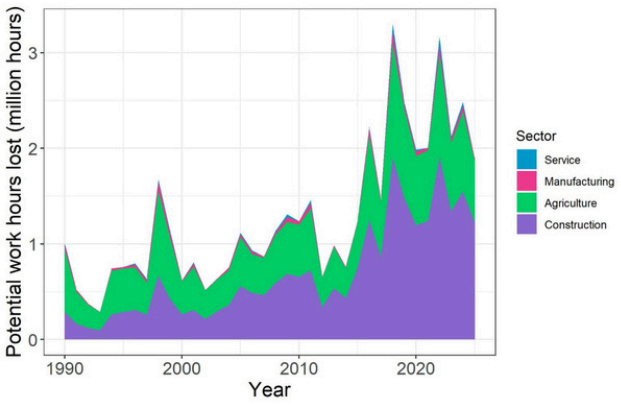
Exposure to high temperatures increases the risk of heat-related illness and mortality. Vulnerable groups, including older adults, young children, pregnant women and those with pre-existing conditions, face the greatest risks.

Between 2021 and 2025, children under one year of age and adults over 65 in New Zealand experienced an average of approximately 4 to 5 heatwave days annually, a 31% increase for both groups compared with the 1986–2005 baseline. (Indicator 1.1.1)

Between 2020 and 2024, the average annual monetised value of heat-related mortality among people aged over 65 in New Zealand was approximately US$0.2 billion, equivalent to around 13,200 average annual incomes. This was a 342% increase compared with 2000–2004. (Indicator 4.1.2)

People in New Zealand were exposed to approximately 18 hours annually in which heat posed a moderate or higher risk of heat stress during moderate outdoor physical activity (e.g., brisk walking) between 2016 and 2025, an increase of 8.7 hours (94%) compared with the annual average in the 1990s. (Indicator 1.1.2)

Annual potential work hours lost, disaggregated by economic sector. New Zealand, 1990–2025.



People in New Zealand lost an estimated 29 hours of sleep annually due to high night-time temperatures between 2021 and 2025, approximately two hours more per year than in 1986–2005. (Indicator 1.1.4)

Heat exposure caused an average annual loss of 2.3 million potential labour hours in New Zealand between 2016 and 2025, 192% higher than the annual average in the 1990s. Construction accounted for 60% of these losses, followed by agriculture at 36%. (Indicator 1.1.3)

Heat-related labour capacity reduction in New Zealand caused an estimated potential earnings loss of US$0.04 billion in 2025. Construction accounted for 70% of these losses. (Indicator 4.1.3)

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Drought, Coastal Change, and Health

Drought can threaten water availability, food security and livelihoods, with consequences for health and wellbeing. Sea-level rise poses additional risks to coastal communities through flooding and disruption to essential services, while warming coastal waters can affect marine ecosystems and fisheries. In New Zealand, extreme drought has become more widespread and coastal sea surface temperatures have risen, highlighting risks to water security, marine food systems and livelihoods.

An average of 32% of New Zealand's land area experienced at least one month of extreme drought annually between 2021 and 2025, compared with 20% in 1981–1990. (Indicator 1.2.2)

In 2025, approximately 48,000 people in New Zealand lived in areas less than one metre above sea level, highlighting potential risks from coastal flooding, displacement and disruption to essential services. (Indicator 2.3.3)

Coastal sea surface temperatures around New Zealand were 0.8°C higher between 2023 and 2025 than in 1981–2010. Warming coastal waters can affect marine ecosystems and fish stocks, with implications for marine food security and livelihoods. (Indicator 1.4.4)

Energy Transition and Health

Fossil fuel combustion contributes to harmful air pollution, increasing the risk of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases and premature mortality. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), New Zealand's annual mean concentration of fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$) was 9 μg/m³, exceeding the WHO annual guideline of 5 μg/m³. Expanding household and road transport electrification powered by renewable electricity can improve air quality, protect health and lower greenhouse gas emissions.

Exposure to anthropogenic fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$) was associated with an estimated 544 deaths in New Zealand in 2023, an 18.5% increase from 2016. Fossil fuel combustion contributed to approximately 55% of these deaths, while transport accounted for 47% of deaths attributable to anthropogenic $PM_{2.5}$ pollution. (Indicator 3.2.1)

In 2023, the monetised value of years of life lost due to air pollution in New Zealand amounted to US$2.4 billion, equivalent to approximately 0.9% of national GDP. (Indicator 4.1.4)

HEALTHCARE SECTOR EMISSIONS

Health systems play an essential role in protecting people from the health impacts of climate change, yet their own greenhouse gas emissions contribute to climate change. Reducing healthcare emissions can support climate change mitigation while maintaining essential health services.

New Zealand's healthcare sector emitted 8.1 million tonnes of greenhouse gases in 2023, a 37% increase compared with 2016. (Indicator 3.5)

In 2023, electricity accounted for 72.8% of household energy use in New Zealand. (Indicator 3.1.2)

Electricity accounted for only 0.4% of road transport energy use in New Zealand in 2023. (Indicator 3.1.3)

In 2024, revenues from carbon pricing in New Zealand exceeded fossil fuel subsidies, resulting in net carbon revenue of approximately US$0.2 billion, equivalent to 0.8% of national health expenditure. Carbon pricing can support reductions in fossil fuel combustion and associated air pollution, delivering benefits for health. (Indicator 4.3.2)

Healthy Diets and Food Systems

Unhealthy diets contribute to preventable mortality, while food production and consumption generate greenhouse gas emissions. In New Zealand, excessive consumption of red meat, processed meat and dairy contributes to substantial diet-related mortality, while emissions associated with these products account for a large share of food consumption-related emissions. Shifting towards healthier dietary patterns can deliver benefits for both health and the climate.

In 2023, approximately 2,900 deaths in New Zealand were associated with excessive consumption of dairy, red meat and processed meat, while a further 817 deaths were associated with insufficient consumption of healthy plant-based foods, including fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, nuts and seeds. Shifting towards healthier, balanced diets can reduce diet-related mortality. (Indicator 3.3.2)

Emissions associated with New Zealand's consumption of agricultural food products decreased by 21.5% between 2016 and 2023. Emissions associated with red meat and dairy consumption declined by 25.9% over the same period, although these products still accounted for 82.4% of food consumption-related emissions in 2023. (Indicator 3.3.1)

Romanello M, Walawender M, Israelsson J et al. The 2026 report of the Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: A decade of escalating health harms and a decisive moment for all. The Lancet 2026; published online October 2026. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(26)01779-4
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