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

A decade tracking progress on health and climate change

UNITED KINGDOM

LANCET COUNTDOWN ON HEALTH AND CLIMATE CHANGE
DATA SHEET 2026

Health and Climate Change in the United Kingdom

The Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change tracks the connections between health and climate change. In its tenth iteration, the 2026 Global Report shows that the health impacts of climate change have escalated and frequently accelerated in the decade since the Paris Agreement came into force.

This document presents key country-level findings from the 2026 Lancet Countdown report for the United Kingdom.

Extreme heat is placing a growing burden on health and livelihoods in the UK, with sharply higher heatwave exposure among very young children and older adults and substantial losses in labour capacity.

Fossil fuels remain deeply embedded across the UK's energy system, and fossil-fuel subsidies continue to outweigh carbon-pricing revenues. This increasingly challenges local health and wellbeing.

Unhealthy diets remain a major and preventable cause of death in the UK: deaths linked to eating too few plant-based foods are rising, and red meat and dairy still make up most food-related emissions despite modest declines.

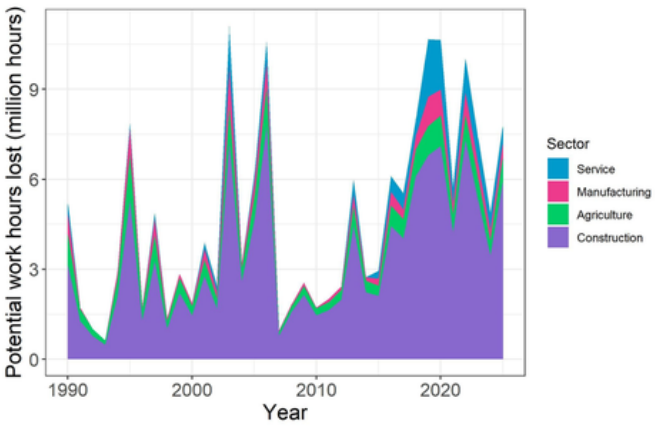
Heat and Health

Extreme heat threatens health, lives and livelihoods, reducing labour productivity and placing growing pressure on the NHS. In the UK, heatwave exposure is rising faster than the global average and 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.

82% of the heatwave days that people in the UK were, on average, exposed to between 2021 and 2025 would not have been expected to occur without climate change. (Indicator 1.1.1)

Children under one year of age and adult over 65 experienced an additional 4.5 heatwave days per year on average between 2016 and 2025 - this was an increase of 105% compared to the 1986-2005. (Indicator 1.1.1)

Annual potential work hours lost, disaggregated by economic sector. United Kingdom, 1990 to 2025.



ECONOMIC IMPACT OF HEAT

Heat stress reduces labour productivity, undermining livelihoods and the social determinants of health. In the UK, this has direct implications for income, food security, and access to care.

- The average annual economic value of years of life lost due to heat among those aged 65 and older was $6.7 billion between 2021 and 2025, equivalent to 387,300 average UK incomes. This is a 149% increase since 2000 to 2004. (Indicator 4.1.2)
- The potential income lost from reduced labour capacity due to heat was US$ 173 million in 2025. Workers in the construction sector were the most severely affected, incurring 80% of the losses. (Indicator 4.1.3)

Heat exposure caused an annual loss of 7.7 million potential labour hours on average, between 2016 and 2025, which is 154% higher than the average year in the 1990s. The construction sector was most affected, accounting for 71.3% of losses. (Indicator 1.1.3)

People were exposed to 13.5 more hours of moderate or higher risk of heat stress if undertaking moderate outdoor physical activity (e.g., brisk walking) per year in 2016-2025 compared with the 1990s. (Indicator 1.1.2)

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

A decade tracking progress on health and climate change

Extreme Weather Events and Health

Wildfires, droughts, and dust storms are increasing in frequency and severity due to climate change. These events degrade air quality, disrupt food and water systems, and elevate risks of respiratory, cardiovascular, and infectious diseases. In the UK, health systems face rising demand during and after such events.

Wildfire smoke caused an annual average of 2500 deaths in the UK from 2021 to 2025, up from 1700 annual average deaths in 2003 to 2012. In 2025, there was a record-breaking 3500 deaths. (Indicator 1.2.1)

An average of 28% of the UK's land area experienced at least one month of extreme drought per year between 2021 to 2025, up from 22% from 1981 to 1990. In 2025, nearly 40% of UK's land are experienced at least 6 months of extreme drought. (Indicator 1.2.2)

Air Pollution, Energy Transition, and Health Co-benefits

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), the UK's annual mean concentration of fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$) was 10 $\mu g/m^3$, twice the WHO's recommended annual guideline of 5 $\mu g/m^3$. Reducing dependence on polluting fuels can improve air quality and protect health, while also reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

In 2023, the carbon intensity of the UK's energy system decreased to 47.4 tCO_2/TJ, which is 5.5% lower than in 2016. As of 2023, coal made up 2% of the UK's total energy supply and 1.3% of electricity generation, down from 6.4% and 9.2% in 2016 respectively. Renewables accounted for 5.7% of total energy supply and 33% of electricity, more than a doubling since 2016. (Indicator 3.1.1)

In 2023, 3% of household energy still came from harmful biomass, a 101.6% increase from 2016, and 68% came from fossil fuels (liquid fossil fuels and natural gas). (Indicator 3.1.2)

In 2023, fossil fuels still accounted for 91.6% of all road transport energy, and electricity accounted for only 1.5%. (Indicator 3.1.3)

The UK had a net-negative carbon revenue in 2024, indicating that fossil fuel subsidies were higher than carbon prices. The country saw a net subsidy of almost US$20 billion (as per 2025 currency exchange values), which is equivalent to 5% of the national health budget. (Indicator 4.3.2)

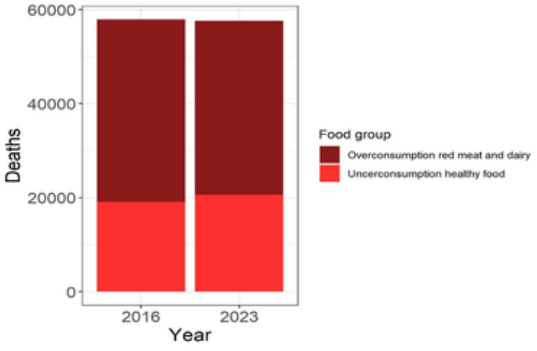
Diet and Health

Shifting to healthier, plant-rich diets can reduce agricultural emissions and improve health outcomes. In the UK, diet-related risks contribute to preventable deaths and chronic disease burden.

The emissions associated with demand for agricultural food products decreased by 7.7% between 2016 and 2023. Red meat and dairy emissions decreased by 14.5% in the same time period and accounted for 68% of all consumption-related emissions in 2023. (Indicator 3.3.1)

In 2023, 20,600 deaths were linked to not eating enough healthy plant-based foods, like fruits, vegetables, beans, whole grains, nuts, and seeds, up from 19,100 in 2016. Another 37,100 deaths were linked to eating excessive dairy, red meat, and processed meat, a decrease by 4.4% (1700 deaths) from 2016. (Indicator 3.3.2)

The graph shows the number of deaths attributable to dietary imbalances in 2016 and 2023 - namely high intake of red meat and dairy and low intake of nutritious plant-based foods.



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
World Health Organization (2023). Health and environment scorecard: United Kingdom