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

A decade tracking progress on health and climate change

UNITED STATES

LANCET COUNTDOWN ON HEALTH AND CLIMATE CHANGE
DATA SHEET 2026

Health and Climate Change in the United States

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 draws on findings from the 2026 Lancet Countdown Global Report to present key insights for the United States.

Climate change is increasing heatwave exposure in the United States, with consequences for heat-related mortality, sleep, physical activity and labour capacity, while placing vulnerable populations at greater risk.

Wildfire-smoke-related mortality has increased substantially in the United States, while more widespread extreme drought and changing coastal conditions pose additional risks to water security, health and livelihoods.

Air pollution contributes to substantial premature mortality in the United States. Expanding renewable electricity generation and its use in households and road transport can reduce harmful air pollution and protect health.

Unhealthy dietary patterns contribute to substantial mortality in the United States, while emissions associated with food consumption highlight opportunities to improve health and reduce the environmental impacts of diets.

Heat and Health

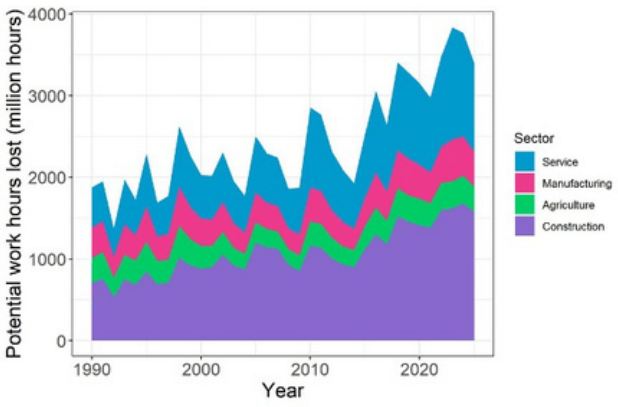
Exposure to high temperatures increases the risk of heat-related illness and mortality. Vulnerable groups, including older adults, young children, pregnant women and those with pre-existing conditions face the greatest risks. Heat can also disrupt sleep, limit safe physical activity and reduce people's capacity to work, with consequences for livelihoods.

85.8% of heatwave days experienced by people in the United States were directly attributable to climate change in 2025. Between 2021 and 2025, children under one year of age and adults over 65 experienced approximately 11 heatwave days annually, around five additional days per year compared with 1986–2005. This represents increases of approximately 91% and 82%, respectively. (Indicator 1.1.1)

The average annual monetised value of heat-related mortality among people aged over 65 in the United States was US$23.4 billion between 2021 and 2025, equivalent to approximately 1.35 million average annual incomes. This was 222% higher than in 2000–2004. (Indicator 4.1.2)

People in the United States were exposed to approximately 772 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, approximately 175 hours more than the annual average in the 1990s. (Indicator 1.1.2)

Annual potential work hours lost, disaggregated by economic sector. United States, 1990-2025.



People in the United States lost an estimated 33.7 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 approximately 3.3 billion potential labour hours in the United States between 2016 and 2025, 69% higher than the annual average in the 1990s. Potential hours lost per worker increased by 33% over the same period, reaching approximately 20 hours annually, indicating that the increase in total losses also reflects changes in the size and composition of the exposed workforce. Construction accounted for approximately 45% of these losses. (Indicator 1.1.3)

Heat-related labour capacity reduction in the United States caused an estimated potential earnings loss of US$118.9 billion in 2025, equivalent to 0.4% of national GDP. Construction accounted for 46% of these losses. (Indicator 4.1.3)

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Wildfires, Drought, and Coastal Health Risks

Wildfire smoke contributes to harmful air pollution, increasing the risk of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases and premature mortality. Drought can threaten water security, food production and livelihoods, while sea-level rise and warming coastal waters create additional risks for coastal communities and marine food security.

Wildfire smoke was associated with an annual average of approximately 36,300 deaths in the United States between 2021 and 2025, compared with 19,300 annually in 2003–2012, an increase of approximately 88%. The wildfire-smoke-associated mortality rate also increased, from 6.6 to 10.9 deaths per 100,000 people over the same periods. (Indicator 1.2.1)

An average of approximately 36% of the United States' land area experienced at least one month of extreme drought annually between 2021 and 2025, compared with 17% in 1981–1990. The number of months with low freshwater storage also increased by 2.8% between 2006–2015 and 2016–2025. (Indicator 1.2.2)

In 2025, approximately 1.84 million people in the United States, equivalent to 0.5% of the population, lived in areas less than one metre above sea level, highlighting potential risks from coastal flooding and disruption to essential services. (Indicator 2.3.3)

Coastal sea surface temperatures around the United States were 0.5°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 1.4.1)

LIVED EXPERIENCE

Our people in Oklahoma get hit over and over with disasters in the same areas. Listening and validating feelings goes a long way in helping someone address their stress and trauma, but so many of our people have trauma upon trauma.

Anonymous, health aid worker, Oklahoma, United States of America

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), the annual mean concentration of fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$) in the United States was 7 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 approximately 137,000 deaths in the United States in 2023, a 1.3% decrease from 2016. Fossil fuel combustion contributed to approximately 37% of these deaths. Pollution from the agriculture sector was responsible for 31% of air pollution related deaths (Indicator 3.2.1).

In 2023, the monetised value of premature mortality associated with air pollution in the United States amounted to approximately US$1.06 trillion, equivalent to 3.6% of national GDP. (Indicator 4.1.4)

In 2023, electricity accounted for 48.1% of household energy use in the United States. (Indicator 3.1.2)
In 2023, electricity accounted for only 0.2% of road transport energy use in the United States. (Indicator 3.1.3)

Renewable sources accounted for 15% of electricity generation in the United States in 2023, more than double their share in 2016. (Indicator 3.1.1)

In 2023, the United States had 449 Mt of greenhouse gas emissions from the healthcare sector. This was a 5.9% increase from 2016. (Indicator 3.5)

Diet and Health

Access to affordable, diverse and nutritious diets is essential for protecting health. Dietary patterns influence the risk of non-communicable diseases, while food production and consumption contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. Improving diets can reduce diet-related mortality while supporting more sustainable food systems.

In 2023, approximately 230,200 deaths in the United States were associated with excessive consumption of dairy, red meat and processed meat, a 15% increase from 2016. A further 217,700 deaths were associated with insufficient consumption of healthy plant-based foods, including fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, nuts and seeds, compared with approximately 206,900 in 2016. Improving access to affordable, diverse and nutritious diets can help reduce diet-related mortality. (Indicator 3.3.2)

Emissions associated with the United States' consumption of agricultural food products increased by 0.5% between 2016 and 2023. Emissions associated with red meat and dairy consumption increased by 2% over the same period, with these products accounting for 69.1% of food consumption-related emissions in 2023. (Indicator 3.3.1)

Testimonials were collected by The Geneva Learning Foundation as part of efforts to elevate health worker voices and recognize their lived experiences as valuable evidence in climate and health policy.

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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