

Most children in South Asia are exposed to extreme high temperatures, UNICEF says



A mother holds an umbrella over her child to escape from hot weather in Kolkata , India, on 3 July 2023. Debarchan Chatterjee/NurPhoto/Getty Images

Nearly half a billion children in South Asia are exposed to extreme high temperatures as life-threatening heat waves caused by the climate crisis become stronger and more frequent, according to the United Nations' children's agency, Monday, August 7, 2023.

In a news release Monday, UNICEF said its analysis of 2020 data showed an estimated 460 million children in countries including Afghanistan, India and Pakistan were exposed to temperatures where 83 or more days in a year exceeded 35 degrees Celsius (95 Fahrenheit) – making South Asia the hardest-hit region for those under age 18.

The analysis showed 76% of children in South Asia were exposed to extreme high temperature compared to 32% globally, UNICEF said.

“Countries in the region are not the hottest in the world right now but the heat here brings life-threatening risks for millions of vulnerable children,” said Sanjay Wijesekera, UNICEF regional director for South Asia. “We are particularly concerned about babies, toddlers, malnourished children and pregnant women as they are most vulnerable to heat strokes and other serious effects.”

Temperatures in some parts of India [soared to 47 degrees Celsius](#) (116 Fahrenheit) in June, killing at least 44 people and sickening hundreds with heat-related illnesses.

Pakistan's high temperature

Some cities in Pakistan also saw similarly high temperatures the same month, raising fears especially for laborers who spend hours toiling outdoors and for poor populations with little to no cooling options.

In parts of the country's southern Sindh province, about 1.8 million people were exposed to temperatures of 40 degrees Celsius (104 F) and higher, UNICEF said, giving rise to short and long-term health risks, including dehydration and organ failure.



Girls fetch water from a public tap amid hot weather in Farah Province, Afghanistan, July 26, 2023. Mashal/Xinhua/Getty Images

UNICEF warns the situation is exacerbated for children as they are unable to quickly adapt to such temperature change.

The risks can be life threatening – from fainting and poor mental development to neurological dysfunction, seizures and cardiovascular diseases.

Pregnant women are particularly susceptible to heat and can experience preterm births and stillbirths, UNICEF said.

Prolonged heat and weather extremes

Experts say the climate crisis is only going to cause more frequent and longer heat waves in the future, testing the region's ability to adapt.

India, the world's most populous nation of 1.4 billion, often experiences heat waves during the summer months of May and June, but in recent years, they have arrived earlier and become more prolonged.

In April 2022, India experienced a heat wave that saw temperatures in the capital New Delhi exceed 40 degrees Celsius for seven consecutive days. In some states, the heat closed schools, damaged crops and put pressure on energy supplies, as officials warned residents to remain indoors and keep hydrated.

While the water washed away homes and destroyed villages, water-related ailments began infecting children, giving rise to a new disaster in the nation of 230 million.

In its report, UNICEF warned that ultimately children, adolescents and women are among those who pay the highest price for extreme weather events.

"Young children simply cannot handle the heat," Wijesekera said. "Unless we act now, these children will continue to bear the brunt of more frequent and more severe heat waves in the coming years, for no fault of theirs." – **cnn.com, August 7, 2023**