

Taylor Swift's Brazil concert was hammered by extreme heat. How to protect crowds at the next sweltering gig

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Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Electrifying music concerts and other mass events are increasingly under threat from severe weather events, such as extreme heat.

The tragic [incident](#) at a Taylor Swift concert in Brazil recently, which resulted in the death of one fan, is a stark reminder of what can happen.

The concert took place in a stadium during a heat wave. Fans lined up for hours outside the Rio de Janeiro venue, with temperatures reportedly over 40°C. With the high humidity, this would have felt like almost 60°C, according to a measure known as the "[heat index](#)."

As well as the fatality, fans [reported](#) burns after touching hot metal floors and railings.

There have been other similar events

What happened at the Swift concert is the consequence of insufficient preparation for [extreme weather conditions](#) during a large-scale event. However, this is not an isolated case. There is a [long list](#) of mass gatherings and events affected by [extreme weather](#) in 2023.

In August, a [Beyoncé concert](#) in a Washington DC stadium took place during severe weather conditions. This time it was heavy rain and lightning. Attendees were ordered to shelter in place.

Lightning posed a direct threat to their safety. Those inside the stadium were directed to shelter under covered areas and ramps. Afterwards, several fans were reportedly treated for [heat exhaustion](#).

The directive to shelter in place could have led to overcrowding in covered areas, potentially increasing the risk of incidents, such as a crowd crush.

Another US example was [Ed Sheeran's concert](#) at a Pittsburgh stadium during a July heat wave.

Some 17 people were hospitalized. Health emergencies included heat exhaustion and two cardiac arrests (when the heart stops beating).

We must prepare

Climate change makes [extreme weather events](#) more frequent and intense. So [risk assessments](#) should include detailed weather monitoring and structural assessments for outdoor set-ups to ensure shade structures, for instance, can cope with crowds.

Contingency plans for a rapid response are also needed. These need to include plans to supply water or protective equipment (such as plastic ponchos) and timely safety directions and information.

Such planning should encompass not just the likelihood of extreme weather but also its potential impact on infrastructure, crowd control and emergency medical responses.

Artists play a role too

While the primary onus of safety lies with event organizers and venues, artists can also play a significant role in [public safety](#) during extreme weather. So we need to keep them informed about identified potential risks and planned countermeasures.

For instance, artists can influence crowd behavior positively and prevent catastrophic outcomes, such as a crowd crush. They can appeal for calm or can announce any planned evacuation procedures.

In the most recent incident, Swift [paused her show](#) to ask [crew members](#) to distribute water to fans.

Be safety aware

People who attend [mass events](#) also need to [be aware](#) of the safety issues related to extreme weather and be prepared.

Public education campaigns can help, as can effectively disseminating safety information to empower attendees to make informed decisions.

For instance, an event organizer can send a [text message](#) to all attendees to warn of upcoming weather conditions and a reminder to bring water or wear sunscreen.

We can expect more of these events

The tragic incident at the Swift concert and similar examples are not isolated but indicate a broader trend. With [climate change](#), extreme weather events will pose a more common risk at such mass gatherings.

So we need to recognize and integrate this into how we plan for, and assess the risk associated with, future events. This is vital to ensure these gatherings remain celebratory landmarks rather than avoidable disasters.

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