

Heat claims 175,000 lives a year in Europe: WHO

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Heat kills over 175,000 people a year in Europe, where temperatures are rising quicker than the rest of the globe, the World Health Organization's (WHO) European branch said Thursday.

Of the roughly 489,000 heat-related deaths recorded each year by the WHO between 2000 and 2019, the European region accounts for 36 percent, or on average 176,040 deaths, the WHO said.

The health body noted that temperatures in the region are "rising at around twice the global average rate."

The WHO's European region comprises 53 countries, including several in Central Asia.

"People are paying the ultimate price," Hans Kluge, the WHO's regional director for Europe, said in a statement.

According to the WHO, there has been a 30 percent increase in heat-related mortality in the region over the past two decades.

"Temperature extremes exacerbate chronic conditions, including cardiovascular, respiratory and cerebro-vascular diseases, mental health, and diabetes-related conditions," Kluge said.

He added that extreme heat can in particular be a problem for elderly people and be an "additional burden" for pregnant women.

The WHO noted that "heat stress"—which occurs when the human body is no longer able to maintain its temperature—"is the leading cause of climate-related death" in the region.

According to the WHO, the number of heat-related deaths is set to "soar" in the coming years as a result of global warming.

"The three warmest years on record" for the region "have all occurred since 2020, and the 10 warmest years have been since 2007," Kluge said.

On July 25, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned that humanity was suffering from an "extreme heat epidemic" and called for action to limit the impacts of heat waves intensified by climate change.

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