
Estimated Percentage of Heat-related Deaths by Citizenship (2005-2014)

96% Non-U.S. Citizen

4% U.S. Citizen

Three states: Arizona, California, and Texas accounted for 95% of non-U.S. citizen deaths, and 37% of U.S. citizen deaths in 2005-2014.

Non-U.S. citizens age 18 to 24 were 20 times more likely to die from excessive heat exposure than were U.S. citizens in the same age group.

BACKGROUND

Heat-related illnesses are a leading cause of death from natural weather or environmental events.

In the U.S., an average of 658 people died per year from 1999 to 2009 due to exposure to excessive natural heat.

Crop workers, who are more likely to be young adults and reside in Southwestern states, are at higher risk of heat-related death or illness.

Crop workers are more likely to be non-U.S. citizens.

Climate change is increasing the overall temperature and number of extreme heat events (USGCRP, 2016). These changes can cause fatal heat stress conditions, such as heat stroke.

The identification of racial, ethnic, geographic, and socioeconomic health disparities can inform interventions to advance health equity.

PUBLIC HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

With climate change, long-term heat-related mortality is expected to increase. There is a significant disparity in the number of heat-related deaths for non-U.S. citizens. If continued, this will greatly affect the loss of life and the economy in our communities.

Climate change and extreme heat threaten everyone’s health, but current public health interventions may not help prevent heat-related deaths for non-U.S. citizens.

Excluding non-U.S. citizens studies on heat-related morbidity and mortality could result in underestimating the number of heat-related deaths in the U.S. by almost 20%, which may affect our ability to prepare for and respond to heat events.

Compared to U.S. citizens, the young age at which non-U.S. citizens have died due to excessive heat exposure is concerning and emphasizes the importance of reducing risks for this vulnerable population.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Data collection should be standardized nationally to identify how risk factors differ by citizenship status. Also: 1) Researchers should more clearly characterize risk for excessive heat exposure among non-U.S. citizens, such as dangerous border crossing or migrant or seasonal farmwork. 2) States should track non-U.S. citizen deaths and implement specific interventions to prevent or reduce heat exposure, including addressing language and cultural barriers to ensure protection for high-risk groups. 3) Federal agencies, with help from state and regional representatives, should standardize public health case definitions that currently exclude non-U.S. citizens and cause underestimation of the burden of heat-related deaths.
