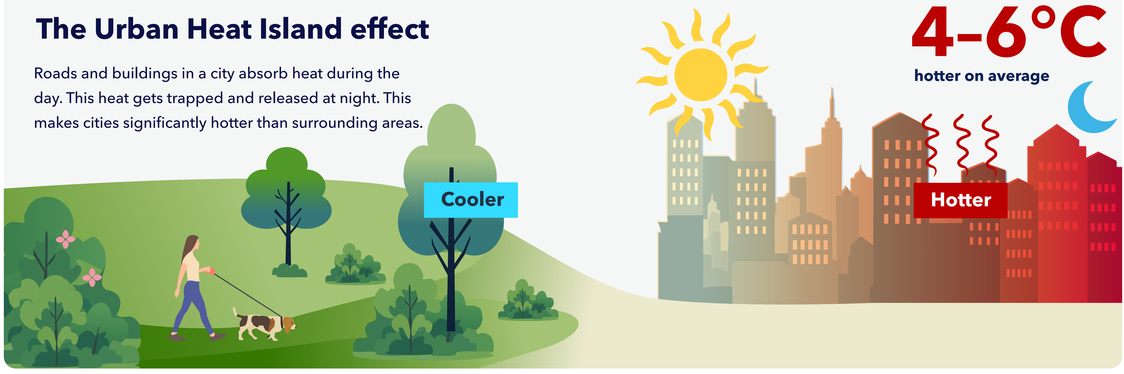
Urban heat and health: The need for swift policy action



Europe is the fastest warming continent on Earth, warming twice as fast as the rest of the world.
Climate change leads to more intense and more frequent extreme weather events – heatwaves, floods, droughts.
In Europe, heatwaves are of greatest concern to health.
The summer of 2024 saw over 62,700 heat-related deaths in Europe, a 23% increase compared with the year before.
And 2026 is set to break new records, with more than 50,000 excess deaths.

The Urban Heat Island effect

Roads and buildings in a city absorb heat during the day. This heat gets trapped and released at night. This makes cities significantly hotter than surrounding areas.



Health effects of heat

Direct health impacts:

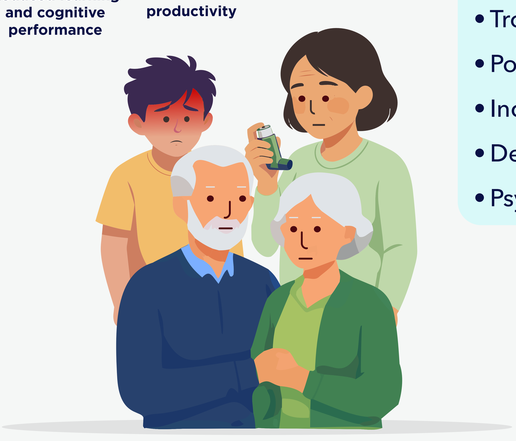
- Heat stress
- Trouble breathing and sleeping
- Reduced learning and cognitive performance
- Reduced productivity

Indirect health impacts:

- Air quality
- Wildfires
- Disruptions of health services and facilities

Mental health impacts:

- Irritability
- Impulsivity
- Trouble concentrating
- Poor quality sleep
- Increased stress
- Depression
- Psychotic episodes



Heat is a particular concern for vulnerable groups:
children, older people, patients, people experiencing socio-economic inequalities

What needs to happen?

City decision makers should

- Adopt an urban heat health and resilience plan
- Increase tree canopy coverage, which can cut local temperatures by several degrees
- Create cooling areas in cities, especially for vulnerable groups
- Use alternative surface materials, such as reflective and permeable pavements, that can lower surface temperatures

European decision makers should

- Integrate the increase of urban green spaces into the Mission for Climate Neutral and Smart Cities framework
- Include nature-based solutions in upcoming climate risk assessments and in updates to the EU Climate Adaptation Strategy
- Include financing for health and climate resilience – including increasing and restoring green spaces in cities - in the next EU budget 2028-2034

UBD POLICY
THE URBAN BURDEN OF DISEASE ESTIMATION FOR POLICY MAKING

FIND OUT MORE AT
www.ubdpolicy.eu

Funded by the European Union

The data presented in this infographic was gathered as part of the UBDPolicy project: UBD Policy stands for Urban Burden of Disease Policy. This EU-funded project aims at estimating the health and socioeconomic costs and benefits of air quality, noise, lack of urban green spaces, heat and temperature, physical activity, inequity for nearly 1,000 European cities in EU and monitors 3-year trends and impacts of urban planning, transport planning and environmental policies. This project has received funding from the European Union's, Horizon Europe Framework Programme (HORIZON) under GA No 101094639 - THE URBAN BURDEN OF DISEASE ESTIMATION FOR POLICY MAKING (UBDPolicy).

Authors: Marianne Chagnon, Anne Stauffer - Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)
Review: Helena Url - HEAL, Silvia Gómez, Mark Nieuwenhuijsen - ISGlobal
Design: Alda Font Studio
Published: November 2026