# India Faces Challenge in Counting Heat-Related Deaths Accurately



**India Potentially Undercounting Heat Deaths Amid Severe Heat Waves**

In 2024, India experienced months of extreme heat with temperatures reaching over 50 degrees Celsius (122 Fahrenheit) in some regions, leading to significant health repercussions. Official reports recorded at least 110 heat-related deaths, primarily in northern India. However, public health experts suggest that the actual number of fatalities is likely in the thousands, as many deaths due to heat are not properly attributed on death certificates. This undercounting could hinder effective response strategies to cope with future heat waves.

Dr. Srinath Reddy from the Public Health Foundation of India highlights incomplete and misclassified reporting as key issues in accurately recording heat-related deaths. Most healthcare professionals document only the immediate cause of death, often overlooking environmental factors like heat. This discrepancy is especially true for non-exertional heat deaths among vulnerable populations such as children and the elderly.

Efforts to address heat-related fatalities include the development of heat action plans, initiated by public health professionals like Dileep Mavalankar in cities such as Ahmedabad, Gujarat. These plans involve creating shaded areas, emergency shelters, and ensuring hospitals are well-equipped during heat waves. However, nationwide implementation is challenging due to inconsistent data collection and reporting.

The National Centre for Disease Control and the National Disaster Management Agency collect and share heat-related death statistics, but discrepancies between different sources indicate an underreported crisis. For example, in 2020, the National Crime Records Bureau reported 530 heat-related deaths, while the disaster agency reported only four.

To enhance preparedness and response, experts advocate for improved data collection and accurate reporting of heat-related deaths. This would enable better understanding and management of the risks associated with extreme heat, which is becoming increasingly frequent due to climate change.