# Extreme heat days in Michigan threaten pregnant people’s health as climate risks accelerate



As we approach the summer months, the escalating threat of extreme heat due to climate change is a growing concern, particularly for pregnant individuals. Recent studies, including a significant report from Climate Central, highlight that across Michigan, the state has experienced an additional seven days of extreme heat each year over the last five years. This increase is echoed nationally, with parts of the Southwest witnessing a jump of approximately three weeks in extreme heat days. Climate experts stress that even a single day of extreme temperatures can pose serious risks for maternal and fetal health, potentially reversing recent advancements in reproductive health outcomes.

Pregnant people face unique vulnerabilities during heat episodes, as their bodies undergo significant changes, affecting their ability to regulate temperature. Lyndsey Darrow, an epidemiology professor at the University of Nevada Reno, explains that alterations in blood circulation and increased physiological demands heighten the risk of complications such as eclampsia, high blood pressure, and preterm birth. The ramifications of climate change extend beyond heat alone; air pollution, flooding, and damage to essential infrastructure can severely impact prenatal care services, exacerbating the stressors that expectant parents face.

Elaine Batchlor, CEO of Martin Luther King Jr. Community Hospital, notes that urban environments contribute to a phenomenon known as the urban heat island effect, where cities are significantly warmer than their rural counterparts due to reduced green spaces and excessive concrete. This intensifies health risks for pregnant people, as urban areas suffer from higher air pollution levels, further complicating pregnancy outcomes.

To mitigate the risks associated with extreme heat, local authorities are taking proactive measures. Denise Fair Razo, the chief health officer for the Detroit Health Department, has communicated that the city has enhanced the number and accessibility of cooling centers. These facilities aim to provide safe, air-conditioned environments for residents during declared heat emergencies. Fair Razo emphasized the importance of rapid response during emergencies, stating that cooling centers can become operational within an hour of severe weather alerts, ensuring that residents have immediate access to relief from the heat.

In addition to cooling centers, the city of Detroit has offered guidance to its residents on coping strategies during extreme heat events. Recommendations include staying hydrated, avoiding alcohol and caffeine, wearing light-coloured and loose-fitting clothing, and staying indoors whenever possible. Community initiatives, such as resilience hubs created by organisations like Eastside Community Network, further provide vital resources, including solar power and support during climate-induced emergencies.

Despite these efforts, the challenges continue. Allegra Hill, a professional midwife, highlights that extreme heat diminishes the availability of outdoor activities, which can help relieve prenatal stress. Hill also points out that such environmental stressors can hinder access to preventive health measures that are crucial during pregnancy.

The current context of rising temperatures is compounded by systemic barriers, particularly for communities of colour. Research indicates that African American mothers are disproportionately affected by heat-related complications, further stressing the need for equitable healthcare access and targeted intervention strategies.

As we prepare for the steamy days ahead, it is essential for pregnant individuals and those in their support networks to remain vigilant about heat exposure and to utilise local resources. The consequences of climate change are manifesting rapidly, and protecting maternal health during these transformative years remains a pressing concern warranting immediate and sustained action.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://planetdetroit.org/2025/06/extreme-heat-risks-for-pregnant-people/), [[2]](https://time.com/7285515/climate-change-impact-healthy-pregnancy/)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://planetdetroit.org/2025/06/extreme-heat-risks-for-pregnant-people/), [[5]](https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/full/10.1289/EHP13706), [[6]](https://www.cdc.gov/heat-health/hcp/clinical-overview/heat-and-pregnant-women.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://time.com/5740394/climate-change-early-births/), [[7]](https://detroitmi.gov/departments/homeland-security-emergency-management-detroit/shelters-warming-and-cooling-centers/cooling-centers)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://planetdetroit.org/2025/06/extreme-heat-risks-for-pregnant-people/), [[3]](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2024/05/08/women-the-first-victims-of-global-warming_6670770_23.html)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://planetdetroit.org/2025/06/extreme-heat-risks-for-pregnant-people/), [[6]](https://www.cdc.gov/heat-health/hcp/clinical-overview/heat-and-pregnant-women.html)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://planetdetroit.org/2025/06/extreme-heat-risks-for-pregnant-people/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://time.com/7285515/climate-change-impact-healthy-pregnancy/> - This article discusses how climate change, particularly extreme heat, is increasingly impacting maternal and fetal health. A Climate Central analysis reveals that from 2020 to 2024, the number of extreme heat-risk days has doubled across 222 countries, with the most significant increase occurring in developing regions with limited healthcare access. Experts highlight that pregnant bodies are less capable of regulating heat, increasing their vulnerability to conditions like pre-eclampsia and gestational diabetes. Extreme heat also elevates risks of adverse fetal outcomes, including preterm birth, stillbirth, and congenital abnormalities such as neural tube defects. Prolonged exposure to high temperatures has even been linked to increased rates of early-term births. Climate change also compromises access to reproductive healthcare by affecting the reliability of contraception and medical tests, and by displacing access to services. Additionally, air pollution and extreme weather events such as hurricanes have been associated with further pregnancy risks, including low birth weight and early labor. Damage to healthcare infrastructure caused by climate change exacerbates these issues, highlighting the urgent need for more research and systemic action to address the reproductive health impacts of a warming planet.
3. <https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2024/05/08/women-the-first-victims-of-global-warming_6670770_23.html> - This article examines how climate change disproportionately affects women, particularly in South and Southeast Asia. A severe heatwave is causing significant distress, with Nepal facing unprecedented forest fires and India experiencing election disruptions. Asia is warming faster than the global average, leading to severe consequences including social disruption, agricultural destruction, and infrastructure damage. These effects disproportionately impact poor populations and women. Rising temperatures have been linked to increased domestic violence, pregnancy complications, and poorer living conditions for women. Studies show increased poverty and child marriages in Bangladesh during heatwaves, and rural income gaps widen in droughts. Although some initiatives, like heat compensation schemes in India, exist, there are insufficient measures addressing these gender-specific impacts. Improved adaptation policies and further research into the gendered effects of climate change are crucial to mitigating these challenges. Only a few countries, such as Cambodia and Vietnam, have recognized these issues within their climate action plans.
4. <https://time.com/5740394/climate-change-early-births/> - This article discusses a study published in Nature Climate Change, which found that rising temperatures due to climate change may significantly reduce human gestational periods, leading to an increase in early deliveries. Researchers analyzed birth rates and daily temperatures across the U.S. from 1969 to 1988. They found that on days when temperatures reached or exceeded 32.2ºC (90ºF), the birth rate per 100,000 women increased by 0.97, while temperatures ranging from 26.7-32.2ºC (80-90ºF) led to a smaller increase of 0.57 births. Potential biological mechanisms include cardiovascular stress, increased oxytocin levels, or disrupted sleep due to high temperatures. The effect was less pronounced in hotter regions due to acclimatization, and wealth impacted the results due to access to air conditioning, with African-American mothers more affected than white mothers. Each 90ºF day shortened gestation by 6.1 days on average, accounting for approximately 25,000 early births annually in the study period, a figure expected to rise with worsening climate change.
5. <https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/full/10.1289/EHP13706> - This article provides a clinical overview of the impacts of extreme heat on pregnancy. It discusses how exposure to extreme ambient heat during pregnancy can lead to adverse birth outcomes such as preterm birth, stillbirth, congenital anomalies, and low birthweight, as well as adverse maternal health outcomes like hypertension, preeclampsia, gestational diabetes, hemorrhage, and infections. The article proposes several biological mechanisms through which extreme heat exposure can harm both mother and fetus, including physiological vulnerabilities during pregnancy, thermoregulatory challenges, dehydration, and premature contractions. It also highlights the potential for acute heat stress to damage placental cells, disrupt genetic activity during organogenesis, and negatively affect glucose metabolism, leading to gestational diabetes.
6. <https://www.cdc.gov/heat-health/hcp/clinical-overview/heat-and-pregnant-women.html> - This article provides a clinical overview of heat and pregnancy, emphasizing the risks associated with heat exposure during any trimester. It advises healthcare providers to remind pregnant women to check the HeatRisk forecast daily during warm months and take protective action when HeatRisk is orange or higher. The article outlines several ways to stay healthy when it's hot outside, including creating a Heat Action Plan with pregnant patients. It highlights that exposure to heat can lead to health harms for pregnant women, including hypertensive disorders of pregnancy and pregnancy complications, and that as little as one day of high heat may increase risk. The article also advises encouraging pregnant patients to check the air quality index (AQI) daily and take protective action when the AQI is >100, since hot days can worsen air quality, which can harm pregnant women.
7. <https://detroitmi.gov/departments/homeland-security-emergency-management-detroit/shelters-warming-and-cooling-centers/cooling-centers> - This page provides information about the City of Detroit's cooling centers, which are activated when a heat emergency is declared. The centers offer air-conditioned comfort and protection from the heat. The page includes tips for preventing heat-related illness, such as staying indoors if possible, drinking water, wearing light-colored clothing, and avoiding leaving people or pets in closed, parked vehicles. It also lists the locations and hours of the cooling centers, including Adams/Butzel Center, Crowell Recreation Center, Farwell Recreation Center, Heilmann Recreation Center, Kemeny Recreation Center, Lasky Recreation Center, and Patton Recreation Center. The page advises residents to contact the Detroit Health Department at (313) 876-4000 for more information about the cooling centers.