

Indian Cities' Heat Action Plans Lack Long-Term Strategies, Study Finds

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What's in Today's Article?

- Heat Action Plans in India Latest News
- Heat Action Plan (HAP)
- Early Onset of Extreme Heat in India
- Rising Heatstroke Deaths in India
- Key Highlights of the Study
- Way Forward: Need for a Comprehensive National Heat Strategy
- Heat Action Plans in India FAQs

Heat Action Plans in India Latest News

- A new study has revealed that most Heat Action Plans (HAPs) in Indian cities fail to incorporate long-term strategies to combat extreme heat. Even cities with such strategies struggle with effective implementation.

- The study, **'Is India Ready for a Warming World? How Heat Resilience Measures Are Being Implemented for 11% of India's Urban Population in Some of Its Most At-Risk Cities'**, was carried out by the Sustainable Futures Collaborative (SFC), a New Delhi-based research organisation.
- It warns that inadequate planning could lead to more heat-related deaths due to intensifying heat waves.

Heat Action Plan (HAP)

- A Heat Action Plan (HAP) is an early warning and preparedness system designed to mitigate the impact of extreme heat.
- It includes both immediate and long-term measures to enhance preparedness, improve information-sharing, and coordinate responses to protect vulnerable populations from heat-related health risks.

Key Recommendations of Heat Action Plans (HAPs)

- **Immediate Measures**
 - Use of forecasts and early warning systems to alert the public and authorities.
 - Public awareness campaigns on heatwave risks.
 - Establishment of heat shelters and cooling centres.
 - Provision of clean drinking water to prevent dehydration.
 - Ensuring hospitals are equipped with necessary supplies and trained healthcare workers to handle heat-related illnesses.
- **Long-Term Strategies**
 - Urban planning initiatives such as tree planting to reduce heat impact.
 - Use of heat-resistant building materials to counter the urban heat island effect.
 - Implementation of cool roofing technologies to lower indoor temperatures.
 - Strengthening coordination among government agencies, healthcare providers, community organisations, and emergency services for better heatwave preparedness.

Implementation of HAPs in India

- According to a July 2024 response in the Lok Sabha, the **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)** is implementing HAPs in 23 heatwave-prone states in collaboration with state governments.

Early Onset of Extreme Heat in India

- February saw record-breaking temperatures, with heatwaves officially reported in Goa and Maharashtra.
- Odisha, Telangana, and Maharashtra have already crossed 40°C.
- 31 States and Union Territories recorded night temperatures at least 1°C above normal, with 22 States/UTs experiencing 3°C to 5°C higher temperatures.

Rising Heatstroke Deaths in India

- Data from NDMA shows an increasing trend in heatstroke-related deaths between 2020 and 2022, with fatalities rising from 530 in 2020 to 730 in 2022.

- However, in 2024, reported cases dropped to 269 suspected and 161 confirmed heatstroke deaths.
- Despite NDMA's report, non-profit organisation HeatWatch reported 733 heatstroke deaths in 17 Indian states between March and June 2024, raising concerns over heatwave preparedness and data accuracy.

Key Highlights of the Study

- Researchers identified nine Indian cities with populations over 1 million that are expected to face the highest increases in dangerous heat index values.
- The study was based on 88 interviews with officials from city, district, and state governments, as well as representatives from disaster management, health, city planning, and labour departments.

Key Findings of the Study

- **Short-Term Measures in Place**
 - All nine cities had emergency measures such as access to drinking water and adjusted work schedules to tackle immediate heat risks.
- **Lack of Long-Term Strategies**
 - The study found that essential long-term actions were either absent or poorly implemented.
 - These long-term actions include cooling solutions for vulnerable populations, insurance for lost work, fire management services for heat waves, and electricity grid upgrades.
- **Misaligned Urban Planning Efforts**
 - Efforts like increasing urban shade and green spaces lacked a targeted approach for populations most at risk from extreme heat.
- **Health System-Focused Strategies**
 - Most long-term measures focused on strengthening healthcare responses rather than preventing heat-related impacts in the first place.
- **Institutional and Financial Constraints**
 - The study highlighted that a lack of coordination between municipal, district, and state government departments was the biggest obstacle to effective long-term heat action planning.
 - Additionally, inadequate funding was a significant barrier to implementing sustainable heat resilience strategies.

Way Forward: Need for a Comprehensive National Heat Strategy

- Adaptation strategies are gaining importance as global efforts to curb greenhouse gas emissions remain slow.
- Solutions like affordable cooling devices pose environmental risks due to ozone-depleting refrigerants.
- Sustainable alternatives such as green buildings, passive cooling, and green infrastructure must be integrated into urban planning.
- India must develop a national heat strategy and incorporate it into its National Adaptation Plan before COP30 in Brazil.

Heat Action Plans in India FAQs

Q1. What is a Heat Action Plan (HAP)?

Ans. A Heat Action Plan is a preparedness strategy to mitigate extreme heat effects through early warnings and urban cooling solutions.

Q2. Why do Indian cities lack long-term heat strategies?

Ans. Poor coordination, funding shortages, and misaligned urban planning hinder the implementation of sustainable heat resilience measures.

Q3. Which Indian cities face the highest heat risks?

Ans. Nine major cities with populations over 1 million are projected to experience the most dangerous heat index increases.

Q4. What immediate measures are included in HAPs?

Ans. Early warnings, public awareness, cooling centers, water provisions, and medical preparedness are key short-term actions.

Q5. What is the way forward for India's heat resilience?

Ans. India must integrate green buildings, passive cooling, and a national heat strategy into its climate adaptation plans.

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