

Impact of Heatwaves on children

Why in News?

Climate change and heatwaves in particular is limiting the time children get to engage with their peers and the world around them through play.

How heatwave affects children in India?

UNICEF's Children's Climate Risk Index (CCRI) report 2021 suggests that with a rank of 26 out of 163 countries, India is among the countries where children are most at climate risk.

- India has been experiencing more frequent and severe heat waves, with temperatures soaring to record levels.
- **Heat wave** - It is a period of abnormally high temperatures, more than the normal maximum temperature that occurs.
- They typically occur between March and June, and in some rare cases even extend till July in India.

A recent analysis by UNICEF revealed that South Asia has the highest % of children exposed to extreme high temperatures compared to other regions.

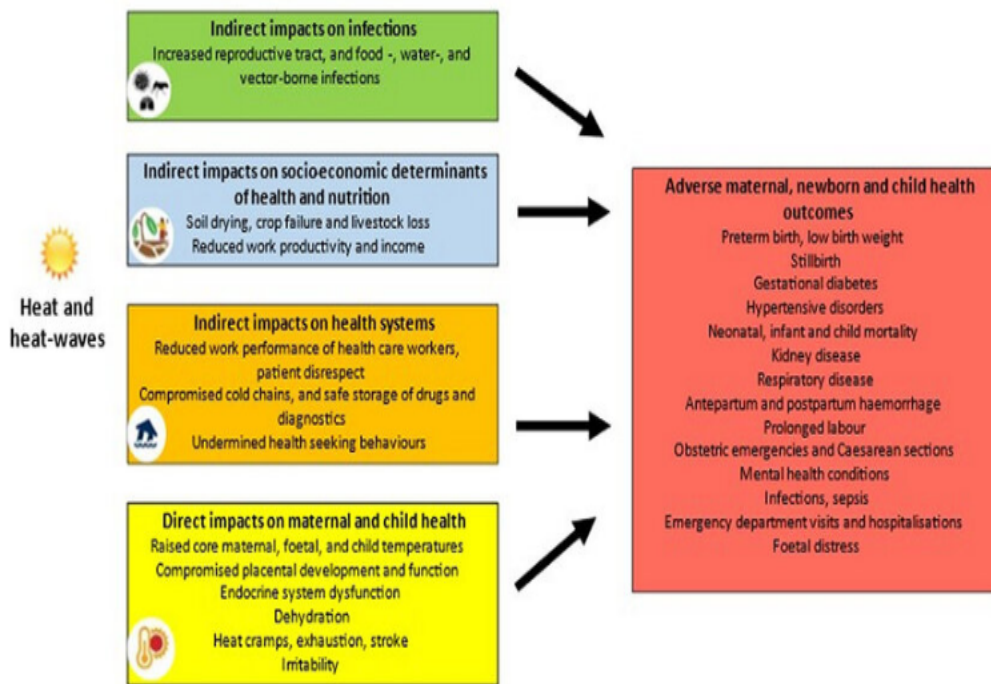
- **Reduces outdoor activities** - Heatwaves, in particular, are making *outdoor play increasingly unsafe*.

Playing for Children's development

- **Play activity** - They are a means to process and explore the world.
- According to UNICEF, play is vital for children to build social connections, develop physical and mental health, and enhance creativity.
- **Significance** - Playful interactions contribute to the positive mental health of parents, caregivers, and children, offering respite from adverse experiences.
- **Recognition** - Enshrined in Article 31 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, the right to play underscores its significance for a child's well-being and development.
- June 11, 2024 was declared as *International Day of Play by UN*.

- **Threatens health** - These extreme conditions not only limit a child's ability to play outdoors but also pose significant *health risks*.
- This can have long-term impacts on their *physical and mental health*.
- **Disturbs sleep pattern**- Heat waves can disrupt children's sleep patterns, affecting their overall health and daily functioning.

- **Increases mortality risk**- Extreme heat increases the risk of mortality in children, especially those with pre-existing health conditions.
- **Disrupts education** - Heatwaves have also led to school closures.
- **Widens inequality** - The lack of play opportunities also disproportionately *affects children from disadvantaged backgrounds*, exacerbating existing inequalities and perpetuating cycles of poverty.
- **Affects individual development** - Impact on child's physical and cognitive development leads to long-term economic impacts such as a *less skilled workforce and higher social welfare costs*.



To know more about heat wave, click [here](#)

What are the adaptive measures need to be done?

- **Implement bioclimatic designs** - It can be used while *designing playground infrastructure* and integrate in urban planning strategies.
 - It involves *introducing green spaces and cooling corridors* within cities, which will help mitigate urban heat island effect and provide safe-play environments for children.
- **Increase access to green spaces** - *Expand opening time and access* to existing infrastructure and green spaces such as parks.
- **Delineate age-specific green spaces** - There is often user conflict in public parks along the lines of age — *older citizens versus children* and along socio-economic classes.
- **Encourage community participation** - Local communities can also come together to create shaded areas in parks where children can meet and play on warmer days.
- **Preserve architectural knowledge** - Long-term solutions should priorities preserving and adapting *vernacular architectural techniques* to implement passive heating and cooling methods.
- **Regulate play spaces** - The places earmarked for playgrounds often become

dumping grounds for solid waste.

- This leads to children spending more time inside their houses with limited avenues for socialisation and recreation.
- **Policy changes** - This dimension of planning should also find its way into State Action Plans on Climate Change and city master plans.
- **Priorities vulnerable children**- Special attention needs to be given to the needs of low-income communities.
 - *Slum rehabilitation colonies*, for instance, in outer Delhi, have extremely sparse green cover.
- **Encourage Children's participation**- Providing students with hands-on activities like biodiversity mapping and pollution assessments empowers them to address environmental issues.
 - Engaging students in local initiatives around climate, such as *carbon neutral panchayats in Kerala*, could be a promising starting point.

References

1. [United Nations | Climate Action](#)
2. [The Hindu | Heatwaves are evaporating the right to play](#)

