'Super' El Niño heat could cause about 55,000 additional deaths in India in Oct 2026 – Mar 2027: University of Chicago's Climate Impact Lab

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News

According to a revised projection released on 28–29 Oct 2026 by the new 'El Niño Heat Mortality Tracker' of the University of Chicago's Climate Impact Lab (USA), India could see about 55,000 heat-related deaths above a normal year in Oct 2026 – Mar 2027, most of them in March. Nigeria (about 56,000) is first, India second. Globally, about 8.57 lakh additional deaths are projected for June 2026 – March 2027. The September report's India estimate of 15,800 rose because March was added and August–September were warmer than forecast. These are model-based estimates, not confirmed death counts.

Key facts

By	Climate Impact Lab, University of Chicago – 'El Niño Heat Mortality Tracker' (monthly estimates for about 3,700 sub-national regions)
India	Oct 2026 – Mar 2027: about 55,000 additional deaths (Sept report: 15,800, Sept–Feb)
Other countries	Nigeria ~56,000; Indonesia ~29,000; Brazil ~19,000
World	June 2026 – Mar 2027: ~857,000 (Sept projection 451,000, to Feb)

Climate context	Copernicus: Aug 2026 – warmest August on record; Sept 2026 – second-warmest September (1.63°C above pre-industrial)
El Niño	Began June 2026; expected to peak around Dec 2026

Background

- Method: it uses the link between daily temperature and all-cause mortality, adjusted for local climate, vulnerability and adaptive capacity, to estimate deaths above a historical baseline. The Lab's co-founder is economist Michael Greenstone.
- Science: body temperature is regulated by the brain's hypothalamus; the body cools by evaporation of sweat. High humidity slows evaporation and raises the risk of heatstroke. Heat hits heart and kidney patients, the elderly and outdoor workers hardest.
- Policy: South Asia's first Heat Action Plan – Ahmedabad, 2013. IMD definition: heat-wave criteria apply only once the maximum temperature reaches at least 40°C in the plains or 30°C in hilly areas. Heat wave is not among the 12 nationally notified disasters; States may declare it a 'State-specific disaster' and use up to 10% of SDRF funds.
- The Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) is part of 'Copernicus', the European Union's Earth-observation programme; ECMWF runs it on behalf of the European Commission.

Tamil Nadu link: in 2024 the Tamil Nadu government declared heat wave a 'State-specific disaster', with ₹4 lakh relief to the families of heat victims. The Climate Impact Lab's September report (Sept 2026 – Feb 2027) projected about 1,640 additional deaths in Tamil Nadu.

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