

Spared the Worst of Summer Until Now, the Northeast Joins a Nation Scorched

The heat index reached the triple digits across the nation's most populous region, and could peak on Friday. Many cities took precautions to help vulnerable residents.



By Jenna Russell, Erin Nolan and Judson Jones

Jenna Russell reported from Plymouth, Mass. Judson Jones is a reporter and meteorologist.

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New York City's power company asked customers to cut back on electricity use Thursday afternoon, and Philadelphia declared a health emergency as the dangerous heat that has scorched other parts of the country for more than a month spread to the nation's most populous region.

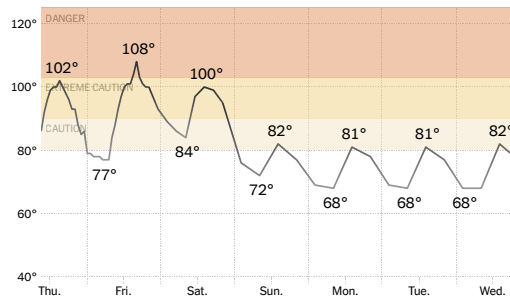
Soaring temperatures and a blanket of oppressive humidity prompted widespread warnings in New England and the Mid-Atlantic States. The heat will probably peak in the region on Friday, forecasters said, before easing over the weekend — a respite not seen in other, longer-suffering parts of the country.

About 118 million Americans, more than a third of the population, were expected to be in the “danger” zone on Friday, with the heat index — a measure that combines temperature and humidity — rising into the 100s, according to a New York Times analysis of National Weather Service and U.S. Census Bureau data. That's among the largest proportions of the U.S. population to be threatened at the same time by extreme heat so far this year.

Cities have responded with emergency measures aimed at preventing heat-related illnesses and deaths. In Philadelphia, where the temperature hit 93 on Thursday and a high of 98 was predicted on Friday, city leaders extended the hours at 32 air-conditioned sites, where local residents can seek relief, and added extra outreach to people without housing.

Heat index forecast for Philadelphia

Data is as of July 27, 8:44 a.m. Eastern. See more detailed maps and charts ›



Source: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration • The New York Times

For many, staying indoors was not an option. Working on a gas line on a South Philadelphia street, Randy Robison, 51, said his welding crew was used to enduring discomfort in the heavy, protective clothing required for the job. “They have to wear that all year round, so they take the worst of the heat,” he said.

New York City, placed under an excessive heat warning by the National Weather Service and facing three straight days of temperatures in the 90s for the first time this year, also took preventive measures, opening hundreds of cooling centers to residents.

“Heat kills more New Yorkers every year than any other kind of extreme weather event,” Mayor Eric Adams said at a news conference. “Access to cooling is a matter of life and death.”



Welders working on a job site in Philadelphia on Thursday. Hannah Beier for The New York Times





Sisters playing in the art installation "Pulse" by Janet Echelman at Philadelphia City Hall on Thursday. Hannah Beier for The New York Times

The power company Con Ed sent text alerts to New York customers on Thursday asking them to limit their energy use between 2 p.m. and 10 p.m. "to help keep service reliable," as air-conditioning use rose citywide.

Dozen of Mets fan boarded the subway in Times Square Thursday evening bound for the game in Queens, where temperatures were expected to remain around 90 for the first pitch. "I think we will be OK as long as we stay hydrated and drink lots of water," Aaron Korn, 40, said. "And Gatorade!" his 8-year-old son, Kingston Nahm-Korn, added.

Baltimore declared a "code red" extreme heat alert, its first of the season, as temperatures there hit 96 on Thursday. Mary Beth Haller, acting health commissioner, said the alert would remain in place through Saturday in hopes of convincing residents to take precautions.



A girl attending summer camp used a handheld fan to cool down at Flushing Meadows Corona Park in New York City. Maansi Srivastava/The New York Times



A subway commuter dabbed his forehead with a napkin while waiting for the train in New York City. Maansi Srivastava/The New York Times

Despite the heat, Antoine Breckenridge, 62, still planned to try and jog several miles in Baltimore's Druid Hill Park while wearing a white shirt wrapped around his head for protection from the harsh midday sun. "I got this stomach I'm trying to get rid of," he said with a laugh, patting his waistline.

Severe thunderstorms packing damaging wind gusts, torrential rain, hail and the possibility of a brief tornado were expected to sweep through New England on Thursday afternoon and evening, and scattered flood watches were in effect. Among the places at risk for flooding was Montpelier, Vermont's capital city, which was inundated with several feet of water earlier this month after heavy rainfall pushed rivers over their banks.

Providence, R.I., was so hot on Thursday that even the state's favorite summer drink wasn't selling. Rebecca Griffiths, who sells Del's frozen lemonade at a stand near the Providence River, said she had made few sales. "It's just too hot," she said. "People are either inside or at the beach."



Employees of Mount Auburn Cemetery in Boston during their shift on Thursday. Billy Hickey for The New York Times



People sat in the shade in Federal Hill Park in Baltimore on Thursday. Rosem Morton for The New York Times

The planet has warmed by about two degrees Fahrenheit since the 19th century and will continue to grow hotter until humans essentially stop burning oil, gas and coal, scientists say. The warmer overall temperatures contribute to extreme-weather events and help make periods of extreme heat more frequent, longer and more intense.

In the Midwest and Southwest, which are already reeling from heat, residents will continue to swelter. In Phoenix, scorching high temperatures of up to 113 degrees were forecast through Saturday, continuing a long stretch of torrid, life-threatening weather. The city did see a welcome milestone on Wednesday night, when the temperature at Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport dipped below 90 degrees for the first time since July 9.

For at least some parts of the country, relief is in store next week, with temperatures and humidity levels in the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast expected to fall back into a normal range — if not below average — on Sunday and Monday.

Reporting was contributed by Donna Owens and Adam Bednar from Baltimore, Joel Wolfram and Jon Hurdle from Philadelphia, and Colleen Cronin from Providence, R.I.

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