

## ⚠️ HEAT ALERT

# Heat Alert: Unprecedented March Heat Wave — New Mexico

Unprecedented Early-Season Extreme Heat Event | Community Preparedness Needed

Issued March 12, 2026 · Healthy Climate New Mexico

---

## SITUATION OVERVIEW

An extraordinary and prolonged heat wave is forecast to impact New Mexico and the broader U.S. Southwest beginning this week, with peak intensity expected late next week. Meteorologists describe this as one of the most anomalous March heat event sever recorded in the region — remarkable in its intensity, duration, and geographic extent. The event will start next week (3/18) and continue through the following week. The specific duration of this event, at this time, remains unclear.

This alert is issued because the timing of this heat wave — arriving months ahead of when such temperatures normally occur — creates the potential for public health risks that require immediate community action.

The National Weather Services has established alerting heat emergency thresholds for summer months.

However, while these temperatures will not reach these summer threshold levels, the following considerations make this event a threat to public health:

---

## WHY THIS EVENT IS DANGEROUS

### 1. Bodies Are Not Acclimatized

Human physiology requires time — typically 1–2 weeks of gradual heat exposure — to adapt to high temperatures. This process of heat acclimatization improves cardiovascular efficiency, sweat response, and core temperature regulation. Because this heat wave arrives in mid-March, well before any seasonal warming has begun, our bodies have not undergone this process. Even individuals who tolerate summer heat well in July may be at serious risk of heat illness this week. The risk of heat exhaustion and heat stroke is significantly elevated in un-acclimatized populations.

### 2. Evaporative Coolers Are Not Yet SetUp

A large proportion of New Mexico households — particularly in lower-income communities and rural areas — rely on swamp coolers (evaporative coolers) as their primary or only cooling system. At this time of year, most evaporative coolers have not yet been serviced, re-padded, or turned on for the season. This means many residents will be without effective cooling during what could be the hottest March temperatures ever recorded in the state. Residents may not realize how dangerously warm their home has become until they are already experiencing symptoms of heat illness.

### 3. Communities and Systems Are Not Prepared

Cooling centers, water distribution programs, community outreach infrastructure, and emergency heat response systems are not yet mobilized — because they are designed to activate in summer. Public pools, which serve as critical cooling resources for families and children, are not yet open for the season. This early heat event catches communities in a gap period where heat risk is real, but heat response infrastructure is not yet in place. Community action is urgently needed to fill this gap.

---

## HIGHEST-RISK POPULATIONS

The following groups face the greatest risk of heat illness and death during this event. Please prioritize outreach to individuals in these categories:

- **People Experiencing Homelessness:** Lack of shelter, shade, and cooling make unhoused individuals extremely vulnerable. Proactive outreach and water distribution are critical.
- **Elderly Adults:** Older adults — especially those living alone — have reduced ability to sense and respond to heat and are at high risk of heat stroke. Check on elderly neighbors and family members daily.
- **People with Chronic Illness or Disability:** Heart disease, diabetes, kidney disease, respiratory conditions, and many medications significantly impair the body's ability to regulate temperature. People managing these conditions are at elevated risk.
- **Children and Infants:** Young children cannot regulate body temperature as effectively as adults and cannot communicate distress clearly. Never leave children unattended in vehicles.
- **Outdoor Workers:** Agricultural workers, construction workers, and others who work outdoors face prolonged direct heat exposure and require employer-level protections and hydration access.

---

## RECOMMENDED PROTECTIVE ACTIONS

### ✓ **Distribute Water**

Proactively get water to vulnerable individuals—especially unhoused community members. Hydration is the single most effective and accessible intervention during a heat event. Do not wait for people to ask.

### ✓ **Check In on At-Risk Individuals**

A phone call or knock on the door can save a life. Reach out to elderly neighbors, unhoused individuals in your area, and people with chronic illness or disability. Make sure they know options are available.

### ✓ **Use Misting and Fans**

Misting the skin combined with fan air flow is an effective method of cooling the body. This combination dramatically accelerates evaporative cooling and can reduce core body temperature rapidly. Misting stations and portable fans are practical, low-cost tools for community cooling.

### ✓ **Avoid Outdoor Exertion**

Strongly discourage exercise, strenuous activity, or prolonged sun exposure during peak heat hours — generally 11:00 AM to 6:00 PM. If outdoor activity is necessary, it should be done in the early morning and with frequent breaks in shade with water.

### ✓ **Seek Cooler Spaces**

Anyone who becomes uncomfortably warm indoors should seek a cooler location. Options include public libraries, community centers, shopping centers, and any designated community cooling centers. Encourage people not to tough it out at home.

### ✓ **Activate and Publicize Cooling Centers**

Healthy Climate New Mexico urges cities and counties to monitor conditions closely and anticipate opening cooling centers ahead of peak heat. Publicize locations through social media, text alerts, and community networks so residents know where to go before they need it.

---

## ⚠ **RECOGNIZING A HEAT EMERGENCY — CALL 911**

### **Heat stroke is a life-threatening medical emergency.**

If a person who has been exposed to high temperatures appears confused, disoriented, or unconscious — or appears to be intoxicated when there is no reason to believe they have consumed alcohol or substances — they may be experiencing heatstroke.

**Do not wait. Call 911 immediately.**

Heat stroke occurs when the body's core temperature rises to dangerous levels and the cooling system fails. It can cause permanent organ damage and death within minutes if untreated. Early emergency response is the difference between life and death.

---

## **BROADER CLIMATE CONTEXT**

This heat event does not occur in isolation. Winter 2025–2026 was the warmest on record across most of the American West, and mountain snowpack across the Southwest is already at near-record lows. This heat wave will accelerate snowmelt dramatically, worsening water supply and wildfire concerns for the region through spring and summer. Climate scientists note that the atmospheric dynamics driving this March event are similar to those that produced catastrophic heat waves in other regions in recent years — and warn that a comparable event occurring in May or June would be far more dangerous. 30 degrees above normal in the Summer could see temperatures reach >120 degrees in some parts of New Mexico.

This event should serve as a wake-up call for communities across New Mexico to build heat resilience infrastructure now — before summer arrives. We urge local governments, health departments, community organizations, and residents to treat this event with the seriousness and urgency it deserves.

---

## **UPCOMING: NEW MEXICO HEAT SUMMIT — APRIL 22 & 23, 2026**

### **Healthy Climate New Mexico is hosting the New Mexico Heat Summit this April.**

As this heat event makes clear, New Mexico communities need better tools, stronger systems, and deeper coordination to prepare for extreme heat — now and in the years ahead. The Heat Summit will bring together national experts, community leaders, public health professionals, and policymakers to do exactly that.

Attendees can expect:

- New resources and toolkits for community heat preparedness
- Presentations from national experts in climate health and extreme heat response
- Strategies tailored to New Mexico's unique communities and climate challenges
- Opportunities to connect, collaborate, and build a statewide heat resilience network

For more information and to register: [healthyclimatenm.org/2026-extreme-heat-summit](https://healthyclimatenm.org/2026-extreme-heat-summit)