

Heat-Waves Kill 200 In Adamawa In 2 Weeks

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No fewer than 200 people have been killed by a dangerous humid heat that has been experienced from the 1st to 13th of this month in Yola, the Adamawa State capital.

Residents who spoke to our correspondent complained about a combination of high temperatures and relatively humid air, causing an approximate 47 to 50 degrees centigrade, which experts describe as a danger level, saying such could cause high risk of heat cramps and exhaustion.

Unofficial records at the Yola Cemetery Corporation (YCC), located in Damare area of the capital city, put the death toll from the unusually experienced excessive heat from May 1 to 13, 2024 at 400.

A former permanent secretary who was one of the eyewitnesses said: “I think 400 could have been a slight exaggeration, but surely, the number of people who died in these circumstances was as high as 200. At some point, up to 20 deaths were being recorded per day within that period.”

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Many other persons who spoke with our correspondent said such unusual heat-waves were a seasonal occurrence in Yola and some other parts of Adamawa State, but that this “Even people who are up to 80 years of age said they had not experienced the excessive heat-waves we witnessed this year,” the former permanent secretary said.

During her visit to Damare cemetery on Thursday, some attendants told her that an average of 35 bodies were taken for burial at the facility on some of the days within the time under review.

Halliru Jauro Usman and Musa Umar, members of the YCC, attributed the increased deaths to hot weather.

Umar said the deceased’s ages were between 50 and 70.

“The actual number of deaths could be as high as 300 or even 400 from May 1 to 13, considering the number recorded daily,” he said.

Umar said the cemetery needed to be expanded in order to contain dead bodies.

His colleague, Usman, said people from numerous parts of Yola brought bodies of their deceased relatives to the cemetery.

A consultant at the Modibbo Adama Teaching Hospital (MAUTH), Yola, who spoke to our correspondent on condition of anonymity, said the surge in deaths could be attributed to high temperature, “leading to high level of infections affecting mostly the elderly.”

The consultant said the hospital had never recorded such a high number of deaths before.

He said high temperature could lead to dehydration, septicemia (also known as sepsis – the most extreme response of a person’s body to an infection) and measles.

We’re handling the situation – Head of epidemiology

Damba Kwenke, the Head of Adamawa Epidemiology, had earlier described the death toll as a rumour. But an investigation team he dispatched confirmed the rising deaths as a consequence of the heat-waves.

Kwenke later urged for vigilance from members of the public, assuring that the state government would manage the situation.

He said public health threats would be taken seriously, and promised to enhance more surveillance to investigate the issue further.

Death toll worst in decades – Ward head

Speaking to Daily Trust Saturday on Thursday, the ward head of Damare community, Ismaila Muhammed Barkindo, similarly said they had not experienced a staggering death toll within a short time as this since 1976.

He said many people were attributing the occurrences to high temperature.

Recalling the past, Barkindo said that in 1976, people had to resort to digging holes under bridges next to rivers to find cold places due to the extreme heat.

In the last few weeks, he said temperatures went beyond 45 degrees in the early hours of the morning in Yola.

He said most of those who died recently did not exhibit any symptom prior to their demise.

“In some cases, people died suddenly without any prior sign of distress or illness,” he said.

According to the ward head, the Damare cemetery was almost at full capacity and that a committee set up was contemplating closing it.

He said the YCC officials were currently considering opening a new cemetery in either Yolde Pate or Mbamba community due to the increased number of deaths.

“A final decision has not been made yet,” he said, adding that he is a member of the committee responsible for finding a new cemetery since the current one is almost filled up.

Extending condolences to families of the deceased, he urged people to minimise their movements under the scorching sun and increase the intake of water and fluid to prevent dehydration. He also advised people to take cold baths to cool their bodies.

A bereaved family member shared a heart-breaking account of how she lost her brother to sudden death.

She recounted how he was feeling hot and sought water to take a bath but could not find any.

“He developed fever and went to the Modibbo Adama University Teaching Hospital (MAUTH), Yola for some tests. While waiting for the results, he suddenly slumped and died on the spot,” the woman recounted.

Hafsat Kawu, a housewife in Yola, said frequent power outage experienced in recent times in and around the city also compounded the situation for most residents, saying that people needed electricity to pump water from their boreholes, use fans and refrigerators, among others.

“It is a distressing moment for many families. We hope the government at the state and national levels will do something,” she said.

Humid heat-waves are reported by experts to be extremely dangerous, and these are common occurrences in parts of Nigeria at certain periods of the year.