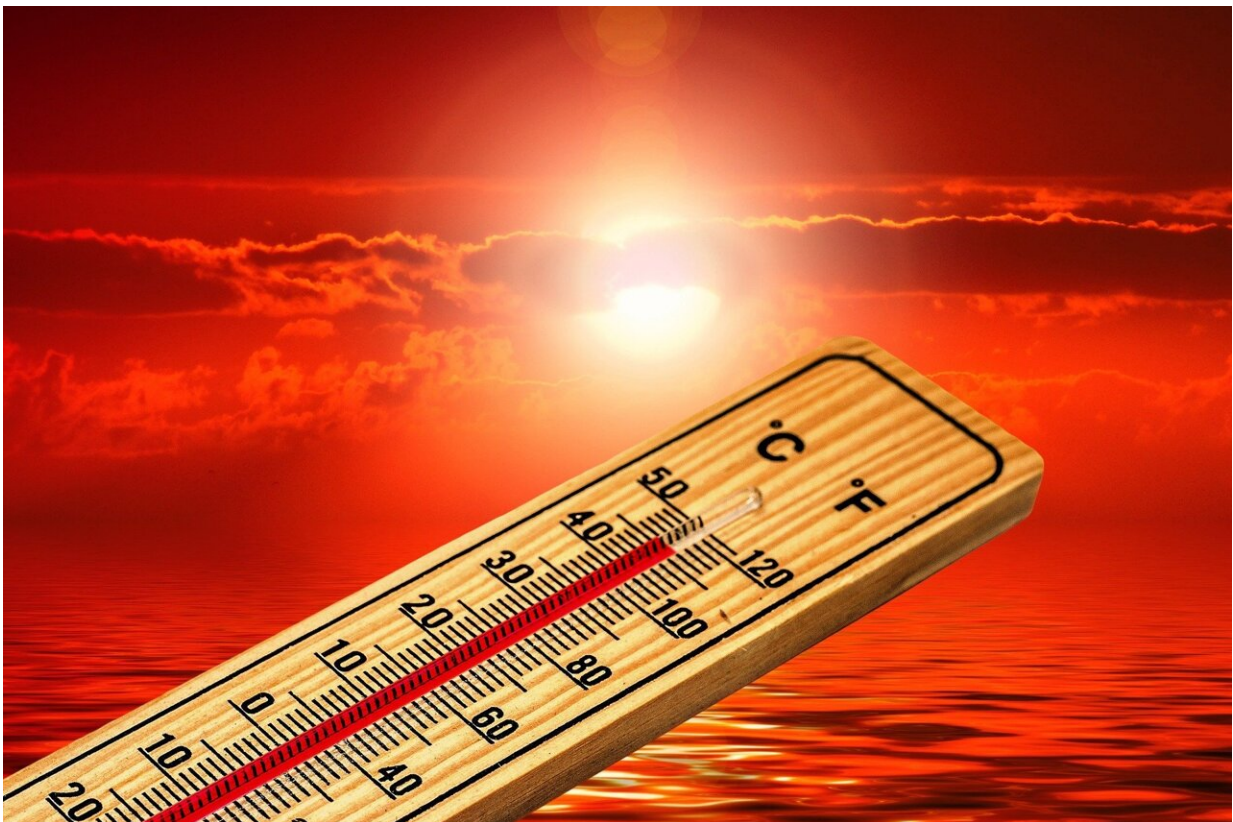


# Heat dome and other climate events have growing impact on mental health, study shows

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Last summer's Western North American heat dome caused more than record-breaking temperature increases—rising anxiety about climate

change is reported in a new study on the weather event's impact on our mental health.

Researchers with the Mental Health and Climate Change Alliance (MHCCA) found significantly higher [climate](#) change anxiety following the heat dome. They believe their study, published in the *Journal of Climate Change and Health*, is among the first of its kind to demonstrate direct links between [mental health concerns](#) and climate change related weather events.

The researchers say ongoing monitoring of climate change anxiety is needed to better understand the impact of individual and compounding climate change-related weather events over time. Their results from data collected from over 850 individuals over the age of 16 found:

- The average levels of climate change anxiety increased by approximately 13 percent among British Columbians after the heat dome.
- Most participants reported that they were much (40.1 per cent) or somewhat more (18.4 percent) worried about climate change after the heat event.
- The number of people who felt that it was very likely their region would be devastated due to climate change increased from 17.5 percent prior to the heat dome to 29.8 percent.
- The number of people who felt that the industry they worked in would be affected by climate change increased from 35.0 percent prior to the heat dome to 40.3 percent after the heat dome.
- Most participants reported that they were somewhat (40.8 percent) or greatly (17.4 percent) impacted by the heat dome.

According to MHCCA director Kiffer Card, an assistant professor in SFU's Faculty of Health Sciences, "Our research explores an important link between two of the most pressing public [health](#) emergencies of the

21st century: Mental health and climate change. In doing so, our work sends a clear message: That planetary health and personal health are one in the same."

Card says the MHCCA will continue monitoring levels of climate distress among British Columbians and hopes to extend its research on climate event-related anxiety nationally. The group has applied for federal funding, though Card notes the lack of availability of federal funding to learn more about the health impacts of climate change remains a barrier. According to the Canadian Research Information System, over the last decade, less than 1 percent of health research funding in Canada has gone to projects related to climate change or global warming.

The researchers say their study is among the first to use a validated climate change anxiety measurement tool to explore the impacts of extreme heat on mental health in Canada, providing new insights that can advance emerging research in the field.

"Leading [medical journals](#) and [public health organizations](#) have identified climate change as the single greatest threat to human health in the 21st century, and [climate change](#) is already causing more frequent, longer and more severe extreme weather events, such as [heat](#) waves and floods," says Card. "These events are causing direct and indirect consequences for individuals and communities around the globe. Our study underscores how the most immediate of these consequences is worsening [mental health](#), as people grapple with worries and concerns about their local environment."

**More information:** Andreea Bratu et al, The 2021 Western North America Heat Dome Increased Climate Change Anxiety Among British Columbians: Results from A Natural Experiment, *The Journal of Climate Change and Health* (2022). [DOI: 10.1016/j.joclim.2022.100116](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joclim.2022.100116)

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