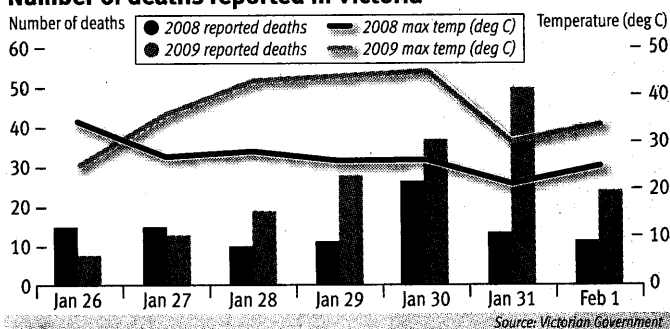


# Heatwave killed 347 people in one week

## HOT DAYS

### Number of deaths reported in Victoria



### Rick Wallace

Victorian political reporter

HEALTH authorities have revealed that the week-long heatwave in late January may have killed at least 374 Victorians, more than twice the death toll from the Black Saturday fires.

Victoria's chief medical officer John Carnie released a report into the heatwave that suggests the elderly and chronically ill made up the bulk of the toll.

The report, which has sparked a policy change from the Government, found there was a 62 per cent increase in deaths from January 26 to February 1 as temperatures soared to more than 15C above average.

Previously, the mean number of deaths in this week in Victoria had been about 606, while this year the total rocketed to 980.

The report also found that as temperatures soared, paramedics were called to nearly three times as many heart-attack patients.

Locums had twice as many calls to attend on a deceased person and there was a threefold increase in the number of patients dead on arrival at emergency departments.

Dr Carnie said the bulk of the extra deaths occurred in those over the age of 65.

"We cannot tell you who these people were, what they died from or where they live," he said. "We do know that some people are more vulnerable to the complications of heat-related stress and these are elderly people and people with chronic health conditions and so on.

"We (also) don't know if some of these deaths were going to occur in the days or weeks after the heat event and they were just brought forward by the heat."

After a mild 25C on Australia Day, Melbourne's temperature soared quickly to 36.4C the day after and then on to maximums of 43.4C, 44.3C and 45.1C in subsequent days. On the two hottest days, the minimum temperature remained above 35C.

Conditions in South Australia,

Tasmania and parts of southern NSW were similarly oppressive over this period.

The South Australian health department and the coroner are also investigating the heatwave-related death toll in Adelaide.

Up to 80 sudden deaths, mainly of elderly people, were reported in a 12-day period from Australia Day in South Australia as temperatures climbed into the mid-40s.

On January 30, when the mercury hit 43C in Adelaide, 23 sudden deaths were reported by police. Only two sudden deaths were recorded in the capital for the previous Friday.

The Victorian findings were based on data collected by paramedics, locums, emergency departments, Victoria's death registry and the coroner. Dr Carnie said data was provided with names and addresses and other details removed on privacy grounds, so it was impossible to say where the bulk of the deaths occurred.

However, he said most of the elderly deaths were those living alone rather than in nursing homes, even though not all aged-care facilities in Victoria have air-conditioning.

Minister for Senior Victorians Lisa Neville said the report had convinced the Government to expand a trial program to monitor independent elderly people with a statewide seniors register.

Under the program, which was trialled in 22 local councils last year, seniors register their details and in the case of a heatwave or other emergency volunteers ring or visit them to check on their welfare.

"I encourage Victorians, particularly young people, to check on elderly neighbours or people they may know ranging from their own grandparents to someone they regularly pass in the street," Ms Neville said.

Additional reporting:  
Jamie Walker