

French heat toll almost 15,000

France's summer heatwave killed a total of 14,800 people, according to official figures released on Thursday.

The figure covers 1-30 August, including a fortnight of record-breaking heat.

The number is almost 4,000 more than previous Health Ministry estimates.

The heat saw temperatures consistently above 40C in parts of Europe.

ESTIMATED DEAD

- France - 14,800
- Italy - 4,200
- Netherlands - 1,400
- Portugal - 1,300
- UK - 900
- Spain - 100

France was particularly badly hit by the weather, with the unusually high number of deaths putting a heavy strain on mortuaries.

The latest report - by the National Institute for Health and Medical Research - covers a longer period than previous reports, including the week when temperature began to fall.

Women worst hit

It says the death rate was on average 60% higher than usual for the time of year.

In some parts of France, notably central France and the Paris area, it was significantly more than 60%.

And the surge in the death rate was greater among women than among men - 70% higher compared with 40%.

Most of the deaths were among the elderly. The report said it was difficult to determine whether there was an increase in mortality among under-45s.

Correspondents say the report will intensify scrutiny of the government's handling of the heatwave, which was seen as tardy and inept.

Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin has promised a thorough review of the health service following the crisis.

A report earlier in September concluded that poor communication and the absence of doctors who were on August leave were contributing factors to the deaths.

Story from BBC NEWS:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/europe/3139694.stm>

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