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## 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.

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.



Unclaimed victims were buried in unmarked graves

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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.

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