Heat waves are common across the United States during the summer. They are dangerous because the human body cannot cool itself properly when exposed to an extreme combination of heat and humidity.

The definition of a heat wave in the United States vary by region; however, a heat wave is usually defined as a period of two or more days of excessively hot weather, often combined with excessive humidity.

Excessive heat is determined by Heat Index Values. The heat index is what the temperature feels like to the human body when relative humidity is combined with the air temperature. AccuWeather's RealFeel® temperature takes into account many more variables that impact the human body. As a result, the RealFeel® is much more representative of how the air actually feels.

Heat is one of the leading heat-related causes of death in the United States, resulting in hundreds of fatalities each year and even more heat-related illnesses.

Urban areas often experience higher temperatures during the summer due to buildings, roads, and other infrastructures absorbing solar energy. This effect of the higher temperatures occurring in urban areas as compared to those outside of urban areas is referred to as “Urban Heat Island”.

Young children, adults over the age of 65, the uninsured and the poor are the highest at risk and most likely to experience heat exhaustion or other heat-related illness.

The 1995 Chicago heat wave, one of the worst in U.S. history, led to approximately 739 heat-related deaths over a period of five days.

According to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, about 6,200 Americans are hospitalized each summer due to excessive heat.

Extreme heat can cause cramps, swelling, and fainting.

Heat waves can result in blackouts and power outages due to electricity spikes caused increased air conditioning use, especially during the peak summertime hours when air conditioners are straining to overcome the heat.