

Study finds visitors to New York 134% more likely to die of heart attack than visitors to other cities

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STUDY FINDS VISITORS TO NEW YORK 134 % MORE LIKELY TO DIE OF HEART ATTACK THAN VISITORS TO OTHER CITIES

Visitors to New York are more than 134 percent more likely to die from a heart attack than are visitors to other areas in the U.S., according to a new study completed by University of California, San Diego researchers Nicholas Christenfeld and David Phillips, and UC San Diego students Laura Glynn and Ilan Shrira.

The study, to be presented Friday at the annual meeting of the Society for Behavioral Medicine, also confirmed that New Yorkers are more than 155 percent more likely to succumb to a heart attack and actually experience a reduced risk when they leave the city for other destinations.

Although previous research has documented the abnormally high risk of heart attack for New Yorkers, this study is the first to document an unusually high risk for visitors to the city and a drop in heart attacks for residents who leave, said Christenfeld.

"Our findings indicate that people who live in as well as visit New York City are unusually likely to die from a heart attack," said Christenfeld, a professor of psychology at UC San Diego. "Although our findings do not identify precisely what it is about New York that leads to such an unusually high risk factor for heart attack, it seems plausible that the level of stress associated with living and even visiting the city may be enough to trigger a heart attack, especially among those who are already at high risk."

The study is based on an examination of all U.S. death certificates from 1985-1994 for New York City residents who died in the city, non-New York City residents visiting the city, and New York City residents traveling out of the city. Similar analyses were also conducted for residents of the ten largest cities in the U.S. besides New York (Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, Philadelphia, San Diego, Dallas, Phoenix, Detroit, San Antonio and San Jose).

The study ruled out other possible alternative explanations for New York's increased heart attack rate, including demographic factors.

According to Christenfeld, although the heart attack rates for residents of other major urban centers such as Los Angeles and Chicago were also examined in the study, none of the other cities showed the marked excess of heart attacks that New York has among residents or visitors.

Christenfeld, an associate professor of psychology at UCSD, is a specialist on human emotions and behavior patterns. Phillips, a professor of sociology at UCSD, is a well-known authority on mortality trends and statistics, including suicide and the role of psychosomatic factors in the timing of death. Their work has been published widely by numerous medical and scientific journals, including *Nature*, *Science*, *The Lancet*, and the *New England Journal of Medicine*. Last year, they completed a study published in *The Lancet* which found a marked increase in deaths in the U.S. due to medication errors.

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