

## Health Risks in a Crowd: Not What You May Think

This is the VOA Special English Health Report.

Picture a huge public gathering -- a sea of people like the hajj to Mecca or an appearance by the pope. Think of the World Cup, the Olympics, a political event, a rock concert or a train station in Asia before the Lunar New Year.

When thousands or even millions of people get together, what do you suppose is the biggest health concern?

Traditionally, doctors and public health officials were most concerned about the spread of infectious diseases, like influenza. Robert Steffen, a researcher in Switzerland, says infectious diseases are still a concern. But he says injuries are a bigger threat at so-called mass gatherings.

ROBERT STEFFEN: "The risk has actually been dominated by sprains or lacerations, or the mortality risk due to stampedes and heat exhaustion in periods of extreme heat."

Mr. Steffen is a professor of travel medicine at the University of Zurich. He is the lead author of one of several new papers about health problems at mass gatherings in the journal *Lancet Infectious Diseases*.

Professor Steffen says children and older people have the highest risk of injury or other health problems at these events. He says children are more at risk of getting crushed in stampedes, while older people are at higher risk from extreme heat.

ROBERT STEFFEN: "At the hajj, it's particularly senior adults who attend, and so they have great risk of suffering of heat stroke and of dying."

Stampedes and crushing at mass gatherings have caused an estimated seven thousand deaths over the past thirty years.



The design of an area can play a part. There may be narrow passages or other choke points that too many people try to use at once. Professor Steffen says the mood of a crowd can also play a part.

ROBERT STEFFEN: "If suddenly they get agitated, for instance, a firework is being launched within a football stadium, then they get very much afraid and try to escape."

He says organizers of large gatherings need to avoid creating conditions that might lead to panic, stampedes and heat stroke. And he says they must be ready to give medical care.

So what advice does he have for people attending a large gathering? First, get any needed vaccinations before traveling. Then, stay away from any large mass of people as much as possible. Also, be careful with alcohol and drugs, which can increase the risk of injuries.

And that's the VOA Special English Health Report, available online at [voaspecialenglish.com](http://voaspecialenglish.com) with texts, MP3s, podcasts and captioned videos. Have you ever been in a huge crowd and worried about your safety? Or did you feel fine? Tell us about your experience. Post a comment at [voaspecialenglish.com](http://voaspecialenglish.com). I'm Christopher Cruise.

## Welcome to Voice of America's Special English Article Activity

This worksheet is designed to be used with: *Health Risks in a Crowd: Not What You May Think.*

Level: beginner - intermediate

Time: 20 - 30 minutes

This worksheet will help you learn new vocabulary about crowds. You will answer questions about health risks at a mass gathering, and write a short paragraph about a large event that you've attended.

1. Match the words on the left with the words on the right to make four phrases. Write the phrase on the line. The answers are in the article.

- |           |       |              |
|-----------|-------|--------------|
| 1. mass   | _____ | a. concern   |
| 2. health | _____ | b. risk      |
| 3. heat   | _____ | c. gathering |
| 4. at     | _____ | d. stroke    |

2. What does *crowd* mean?

Check the correct answer.

- a few people together
- many people together
- people that look the same

3. Look again at the title of the article: *Health Risks in a Crowd: Not What You May Think.*

Which sentence below is true?

- You might be surprised about what the health risks are in a crowd.
- It is obvious what the health risks are in a crowd.

4. What is this article about?

- bad things that can happen in a crowd
- good things that can happen in a crowd

5. Is the following sentence *true* or *false*? If the answer is false, correct the mistake.

Robert Steffen says infectious diseases are a bigger threat than injuries in a crowd.

\_\_\_\_\_

6. What is the name of the journal that published Mr. Steffen's paper?

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Complete the following blanks with the correct words.

Professor Steffen says \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ have the highest risk of injury at public events.

8. What does Professor Steffen say children are more at risk of?

- getting crushed in stampedes
- extreme heat
- getting influenza

9. Complete the following sentence with two numbers.

Stampedes and crushing at mass gatherings have caused an estimated \_\_\_\_\_ deaths over the past \_\_\_\_\_ years.



**ANSWER KEY**

1. mass gathering, health concern, heat stroke, at risk
2. many people together
3. You might be surprised about what the health risks are in a crowd.
4. bad things that happen in a crowd
5. false; Robert Steffen says injuries are a bigger threat than infectious diseases in a crowd.
6. *Lancet Infectious Diseases*.
7. children; older people
8. getting crushed in stampedes
9. 7,000; 30
10. get any needed vaccinations before traveling; stay away from large groups of people; be careful with alcohol and drugs