“If we want to safeguard the health of current and future generations, we have to address climate change.”

Dr. Vivek Murthy | Former U.S. Surgeon General
How Climate Change Impacts Children’s Health

Climate change is the rise in average surface temperatures on Earth, mostly due to the burning of fossil fuels. When fossil fuels are burned, they release carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gases into the atmosphere. These "greenhouse gases" change the atmosphere’s natural composition and cause the planet to retain additional heat, resulting in a host of devastating impacts on ecosystems, including rising sea levels, severe weather events, droughts, and reduced air quality. These impacts on the environment have direct impacts on human health.

As Earth’s climate continues to shift, healthcare professionals are faced with managing more extreme and widespread patient and public health issues, including:

Infectious Diseases
Our changing climate increases the geographic distributions of vector-borne illnesses, like West Nile Virus and Lyme disease.

Reduced Air Quality
Increased ozone concentrations lead to worsening air quality and more asthma attacks and hospitalizations.

Rising Temperatures
Death rates during heat waves increase drastically from heat stroke, cardiovascular, respiratory, and cerebrovascular diseases.

Extreme Weather Events
Prevalence of extreme weather events increases risk of injury and death, and a range of mental health consequences.

Assessing Your Child’s Climate Health Risks

Increased Ground Level Ozone
Asthma exacerbations; interferes with normal lung development; increases allergic rhinitis, bronchitis

Increases in Airborne Allergens
Asthma exacerbations; increases allergic rhinitis, bronchitis

Heatwaves
Heat stress, heat stroke, reduced school performance

Impacts on Childhood Development

Infants
Increases in ground level ozone interferes with infants’ lung development and causes inflammation and restriction of airways.

Toddlers and Children
Worsening air quality compromises respiratory health. Heat waves are related to reduced school performance.

Teenagers and Young Adults
Student athletes who exercise outdoors during the hottest months are at high risk for heat-related mortality.

All Ages
All ages are at risk for mental health impacts, vector-, water-, and food-borne illnesses, rhinitis and malnutrition.

What You Can Do

Mitigate Your Child’s Risk

Know your child’s health risk factors
Work with your family’s healthcare provider to mitigate these risks. This is especially important if your child has a condition like asthma, the symptoms of which can be exacerbated by climate change.

Know your community’s risk factors
Limit time outdoors on high heat days, monitor your local air quality, and check your community’s allergy triggers daily.

Take Action

Talk with your trusted healthcare professionals and local policymakers. Ask them to help you protect your family from the health impacts of climate change.
For More Information

Resources for Parents
Monitor your community’s air quality
www.airnowinova.gov
Learn your community’s State of the Air
www.lung.org/our-initiatives/healthy-air/sota
Know your community’s allergy triggers
weather.com/health/allergy
Tips to keep your lungs healthy
www.lung.org/lung-health-and-diseases/protecting-your-lungs

Sources
www.climateparents.org
www.momsclenanairforce.org
www.mothersoutfront.org

For more on how Inova is leading on climate action, visit inova.org.gogreen
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