

HEALTHY CLIMATE Healthy Children



“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



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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.

Extreme Weather Events

Injuries, drowning, vector-, food-, and water-borne illnesses

Sea Level Rise

Injuries, drowning, water and soil sanitation, ecosystem and economic disruption

Climate Change

Mental health impacts

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.



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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.momscleanairforce.org

www.mothersoutfront.org

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

Contact us at gogreen@inova.org

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