“A healthy planet and healthy people are two sides of the same coin.”

Dr. Margaret Chan | World Health Organization
How Climate Change Impacts Your 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.

Climate Impacts on Lung Health

**Increased Ground Level Ozone**
Chest pains, coughing, throat irritation, congestion, reduced lung function

**Increased Ozone Formation**
Inflammation of the lungs; compromised lung function

**Extreme Heat**
Affects timing of aeroallergen distribution; amplifies allergenicity of pollen and mold spores

**Drought and Wild Fires**
Inflammation of lung tissue, increased severity of asthma attacks, premature death

**Decline in Air Quality**
Lung cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma, bronchitis, emphysema, impaired lung function

Are You at Increased Risk?

Those most susceptible to climate-triggered respiratory problems are:

- Individuals with lung disease, such as asthma, emphysema or COPD
- Pregnant women
- Outdoor workers
- Children under 14, whose lungs are still developing
- Athletes who exercise vigorously outdoors
- Individuals over the age of 65

What You Can Do

**Mitigate Your Risk**

**Know your health risk factors**
Work with your healthcare provider to mitigate these risks. This is especially important if you have a preexisting condition such as 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 yourself and your family from the health impacts of climate change.
HEALTHY CLIMATE
Healthy Lungs

For More Information

Resources
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

ALA Statement on Climate Change
http://www.lung.org/our-initiatives/healthy-air/outdoor/climate-change

Sources
American Lung Association

National Institutes of Health
http://bit.ly/1jugSMV

Spare the Air
http://bit.ly/1K5kxsG

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