

# HEALTHY CLIMATE Healthy Lungs



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

**Dr. Margaret Chan | World Health Organization**



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## 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.



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## For More Information

### Resources

**Monitor your community's air quality**

[www.airnowinova.gov](http://www.airnowinova.gov)

**Learn your community's State of the Air**

[www.lung.org/our-initiatives/healthy-air/sota](http://www.lung.org/our-initiatives/healthy-air/sota)

**Know your community's allergy triggers**

[weather.com/health/allergy](http://weather.com/health/allergy)

**Tips to keep your lungs healthy**

[www.lung.org/lung-health-and-diseases/protecting-your-lungs](http://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**

<http://bit.ly/2iJLvIF>

**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](http://inova.org/gogreen)*

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