

Why should I care?

Climate change and extreme weather events are threatening our health today, and if left unaddressed, will lead to increases in disease, injury and death. Immediate action can and must be taken to minimize the adverse health impacts of climate change and equip public health workers with the tools to protect our communities from negative health outcomes.

Climate change raises major public health concerns:

- 1. Warmer weather brings higher risks of strokes, heart attacks, asthma attacks and vector-borne diseases such as Zika, West Nile virus and Lyme disease** – especially for vulnerable populations such as the elderly, children and people already suffering from illnesses. Between 1999 and 2009, extreme heat exposure caused nearly 8,000 U.S. deaths,¹ and it's only getting hotter. A warmer future is expected to lead to tens of thousands of additional premature deaths in the U.S. by the end of the century.² Immigrant workers in the U.S. face an especially high risk of heat-related death.³
- 2. Changing climate also heightens the intensity and frequency of weather-related disasters** like wildfires and floods that threaten the public's health and safety, resulting in death, injury and illness. Sadly, the health dangers of extreme weather events like 2012's Superstorm Sandy and Hurricanes Harvey and Maria in 2017 don't stop when the storm ends. Sandy killed 113 people, and in its aftermath, countless more people lived in unhealthy conditions and suffered from mental health repercussions like anxiety and PTSD.⁴
- 3. Climate change increases our exposure to harmful pollutants.** Increased ground-level ozone and higher levels of airborne allergens are associated with impaired lung function and increased emergency room visits and hospital admissions for asthma. In addition, rising rates and intensity of wildfires can increase particulate matter exposure, which is linked with higher risk of cardiovascular disease and respiratory illness.⁵

¹ The White House: The Health Impacts of Climate Change on Americans, June 2014: https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/the_health_impacts_of_climate_change_on_americans_final.pdf

² U.S. Global Change Research Program: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7930/J0R49NQX>

³ American Journal of Public Health: <http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/10.2105/AJPH.2017.304006>

⁴ NIH: Mental Health Effects of Hurricane Sandy: www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3638199/

⁵ The White House: The Health Impacts of Climate Change on Americans, June 2014: https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/the_health_impacts_of_climate_change_on_americans_final.pdf

What can I do?

[Tell Congress to uphold the Clean Air Act](#) and support the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Clean Power Plan, which would reduce carbon pollution and help protect all of our communities from life-threatening air pollution from coal-fired power plants and the health impacts of climate change. In late 2017, federal officials issued a proposal to begin repealing the Clean Power Plan.

Annually, by reducing exposure to ozone and particle pollution, the Clean Power Plan would prevent up to 3,600 premature U.S. deaths, 90,000 asthma attacks in children, and the nation's students and workers would miss 300,000 fewer school and work days by 2030. In the long-term, it would also slow down climate change and reduce the serious health risks of a warming planet.

You can also help by advocating for adequate funding for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Climate and Health Program, which provides critical guidance, technical support and funding to help state and local public health departments prepare for and protect the nation from the harmful impacts of [climate change](#).

APHA made 2017 the Year of Climate Change and Health. Visit our [climate change page](#) to see our exciting work.

We all can be aware of how our daily activities impact everyday life in our communities. The careful use of water and energy not only conserves natural resources but will protect the ecosystem, increase access to water and reduce disaster risks. Use of public transportation or sharing rides reduces air pollution and diminishes traffic congestion.

And don't forget that local action makes a difference, too. Let your state and local lawmakers know why taking action on climate change is critical to your community's health and prosperity. Learn more about acting locally at <http://www.c2es.org/us-states-regions>.



The American Public Health Association champions the health of all people and all communities. We strengthen the profession of public health, promote best practices and share the latest public health research and information. We are the only organization that influences federal policy, has a 140-plus year perspective and brings together members from all fields of public health.

Learn more at www.apha.org

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