

Global Impacts of Climate Change: Physical Health

S W I P E T O R E A D



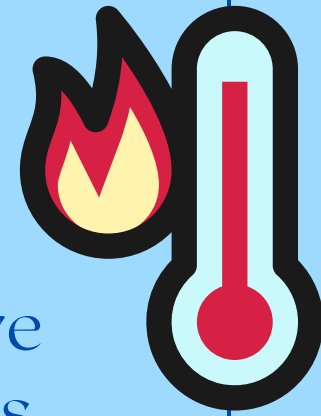
Climate change has a very wide range of impacts and, without intervention, will come to affect us all. In this instalment of EOS's Global Impacts of Climate Change series, we will be explaining some of the many impacts climate change will have on our collective physical health.





One of the most discussed physical health impact of climate change is the increased prevalence of natural disasters. Floods, draughts, and fires will all become significantly more common. They are all already on the rise. In early 2020, Australia faced one of their worst bushfire seasons to date (Centre for Disaster Philanthropy, 2020). This resulted in many deaths and injuries, as well as displacement of many individuals and families in communities across the country (Centre for Disaster Philanthropy, 2020). California, U.S.A. faces increasingly severe draughts, which forces both individuals and businesses like farms to strictly limit their water usage (Archie, 2022). These issues will only increase in severity and frequency if climate change is not managed in the next few years.





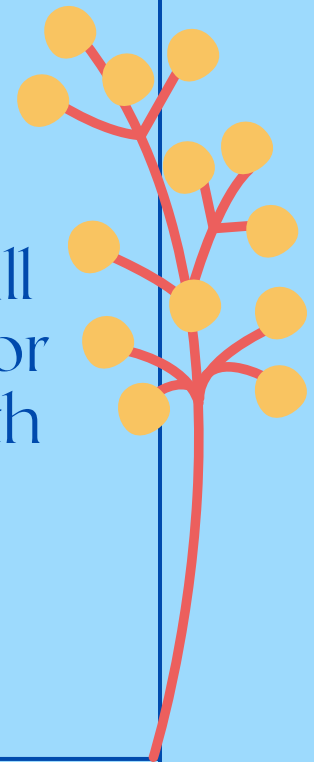
More extreme weather will also become more common and severe. Heat waves and storms are on the rise, both of which can have severe effects on affected populations. Extremely high temperatures can cause bodily harm, or even death (National Academies). Heat creates especially risky environments for vulnerable populations including unhoused people, elderly, children, those with mental health challenges, etc (Cueto, 2022).

Flooding of course can create unsafe environments as well. Flooding can damage shelter and infrastructure. Access to essential services such as clean drinking water or health services are especially at risk due to flooding (Sidhu, 2022)



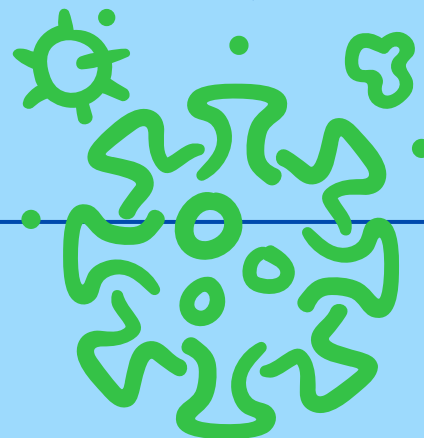


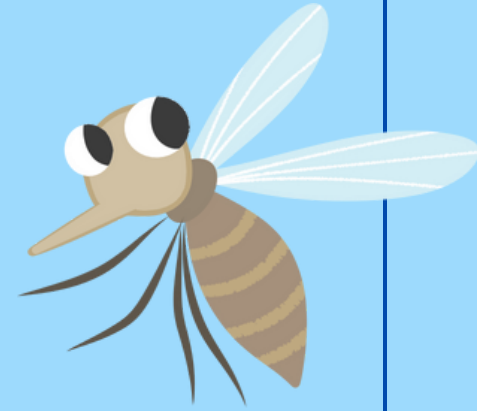
Climate change is shown to lead to changes in precipitation patterns, warmer winters, as well as increased seasonal air temperatures and more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. These changes will have many effects on physical health but one of immediate concern is an extreme increase of pollen and other allergens (CDC, 2020). People with respiratory illnesses like asthma may be more sensitive to pollen. Exposure to pollen is linked to asthma attacks and increases in hospital admissions for respiratory illness (CDC, 2020). Extreme rainfall and rising temperatures can contribute to indoor air quality problems. They can cause the growth of mold indoors, which may lead to worsened respiratory conditions for people with asthma and/or mold allergies (CDC, 2020).



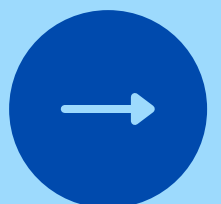
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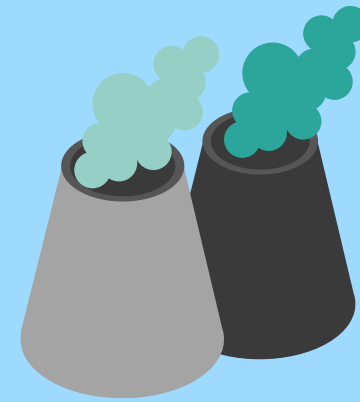
Recent studies show that pathogenic diseases will pose a further threat, as the environmental impacts of climate change, like increasing temperatures and precipitation, can exacerbate many of diseases (Mora et al., 2022). A 2022 study takes this even further and found that over half (218 out of 375) of human infectious diseases have already been or soon will be intensified by climate change. The study found that once environmental climate change impacts worsen, society will not be able to handle the severity and amount of diseases that will thrive in a hotter, wetter world (Mora et al., 2022).





The study by Mora et al., explains that one of the biggest risks brought about by climate change is that climatic hazards bring diseases closer to humans. Global warming and increased precipitation expands the habitats of disease carrying vectors like rats, ticks and mosquitos (Mora et al, 2022). Flooding and draught encourages animals to move out of their typical territories and in some countries is linked increased risk of ebola and Nipah virus. Floods and storms increase risk of contamination of drinking water, leading to higher risk of norovirus, hepatitis, etc (Mora et al., 2022).





Climate change is shown to be a threat amplifier. While the risks of exposure to pathogens, flooding, heat illness, etc. already exist, they are aggravated by our changing environment (Huynen, Martens & Akin, 2013).

The health impacts of climate change will not be equitable; vulnerable and marginalized populations will experience these effects both earlier and more severely. However, climate hazards have already and will continue to reduce human capacity to cope with pathogens by altering our physical condition. Increasing temperatures, exposure to health hazards like pollutants, and stress are already reducing everyone's ability to cope with illness and disease (Mora et al., 2022).





There are many actions that you can take to protect your health from climatic hazards. Having a plan in case of natural disasters like floods is a great way to keep yourself safe. Knowing the potential risks you face is also essential in preparation (Better Health, 2021). Being aware of exposure to pollutants and hazards, and limiting exposure to poor quality air can help maintain respiratory health (Better Health, 2021). Avoiding mosquito and tick bites will help prevent exposure to illnesses like Lyme disease (Better Health, 2021). Knowing the quality of the water where you swim can greatly reduce your risk of waterborne illnesses (Better Health, 2021). There are also many resources available for further help reducing risks from climatic hazards.



Sources

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Information collected by EOS Eco-Energy
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