

# HEALTHY CLIMATE Healthy Seniors



“For Public Health, Climate Change is  
the Defining Issue for the 21st Century.”

**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 the Health of Seniors



### Increased Ground Level Ozone

Chest pains, coughing, throat irritation, congestion, reduced lung function

### Decline in Air Quality

Lung cancer, COPD, asthma, bronchitis, emphysema, impaired lung function

### Drought and Wildfires

Inflammation of lung tissue, increased severity of asthma attacks, increased mortality

### Increased Ozone Formation

Exacerbation of cardiopulmonary illnesses, injured lung tissue, airway inflammation

### Extreme Heat

Heat exhaustion, heat stroke, dehydration, acute kidney failure and inflammation, exacerbation of cardiopulmonary diseases

## Are You at Increased Risk?

Those most susceptible to climate triggered respiratory problems:

- Individuals with pre-existing conditions which limit mobility
- Those living alone, or with small social networks
- Individuals taking medications that impair the body’s ability to thermoregulate
- Those with underlying chronic conditions, such as obesity and cardiovascular disease
- Individuals with limited access to transportation

## 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 like heart disease, 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

**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)

### Sources

**American Society on Aging**

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

**The White House**

<http://bit.ly/1M9PuBV>

<http://bit.ly/1E09eBr>

**Environmental Health Perspectives**

<http://bit.ly/2i2N6zi>



*For more on how Inova is leading on climate action, visit [inova.org/gogreen](http://inova.org/gogreen)*

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