

Effect of Climate Change on Human Health

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Doi: 10.36283/PJMD13-3/001

How to cite: Shareef H Effect of Climate Change on Human Health. Pak J Med Dent. 2024;13(3): A-B. Doi: 10.36283/PJMD13-3/001

Received: Fri, June 07, 2024 **Accepted:** Thu, June 13, 2024 **Published:** Tue, 16 Jul, 2024

Climate change has been the most widely debated environmental issue since the late 20th century. It is a complex phenomenon with far-reaching effects on the environment, human societies, and economies. The term encompasses both global warming, which refers to the Earth's rising surface temperatures, and the broader range of changes that are happening to our planet's climate system¹. Rising temperatures, extreme weather, and diseases are some of how climate change is hurting people all over the world^{2,3}. Of special consequence is that climate change has a direct implication on the lives of people in terms of their health. There has been an increase in the occurrence of respiratory diseases due to poor quality of air and diseases caused by heat.³

In addition to the consequences for health due to high temperatures, the earth is experiencing more frequent and intensive disasters such as storms, floods, and wildfires. These disasters can adversely impact the victim's psychological well-being causing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression in the aftermath of forced shelter, loss, and other traumatic events such as witnessing or being a victim of a violation. There is an urgent need for this emerging health threat to be managed by legislators and medical practitioners to safeguard the well-being of the people globally.⁴

Extreme weather events and rising temperatures pose potential health hazards:

Increasingly longer duration and higher intensity of heat waves are causing heat exhaustion as well as heatstroke. In addition, with the current change in climate that exposes other areas to higher temperatures, there is a likelihood for different infectious diseases to spread since the weather conditions are becoming more suitable for the growth and spread of different diseases⁵.

Climate change-related respiratory ailments and air pollution:

An increase in temperature raises the level of other air pollutants, such as ozone and particulate matter, which cause adverse effects on health, particularly on those already suffering from respiratory diseases such as asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Moreover, natural disasters such as dust storms and wildfires as a result of climate change can worsen the condition of the air and cause more incidences of respiratory illnesses^{6,7}. Such effects of pollution are very detrimental to the youth, the elderly, and any group of people with pre-existing complications in the respiratory system. It is evident that to protect the health of the communities from the hazardous impact of air pollution, climate change should be fought by reducing the levels of emission of greenhouse gases and transitioning to clean energy sources¹.

Approaches to lessen the negative effects of climate change on health:

An essential step is to prioritize public health innovations that address the new risks that come with climate change. It incorporates the formulation of heat action plans to avoid heat-related adverse effects amongst vulnerable groups during heat waves, formulation of early warning systems especially for extreme climatic occurrences, and promotion of environmentally friendly transport systems to reduce air pollutants. Furthermore, continuity of care must be provided to those affected by climate change disasters. This requires investment in enhanced health systems that are not easily challenged by climatic hardships^{2,8}. Education, increased awareness, and interventions linking climate change with human well-being are important to facilitate actions for community self-protection and adaptation to the constantly changing climatic

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conditions. We may try to build healthier, more climate-resilient societies by doing things better and addressing these problems directly^{2,5}.

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