

Climate Change and Health Impacts on Hispanic Communities

Climate change poses serious threats to individual and community health everywhere, including among Hispanic populations in the United States. Changes to our climate are driven by heat-trapping pollutants, such as carbon pollution from fossil fuel-fired power plants, factories, and automobiles.

Climate change causes a net rise in global temperatures that exacerbates health-harming air pollution, adds to extreme weather events and heat waves, magnifies the threat of wildfires, and even changes the spread of certain vector-borne diseases.¹ Climate change can also worsen seasonal allergies due to increased pollen concentrations and longer pollen seasons, and threaten mental health.² Many of these health impacts are already being felt in the United States.

Climate Change and Air Pollution

Climate change is projected to directly harm human health by increasing the formation of ground-level ozone, a key component of smog and a pollutant associated with the increased risk of premature death and diminished lung function. Particulate matter (PM) pollution will contribute to similar health outcomes. Exposure to unhealthy levels of ozone and PM can lead to higher incidences of asthma attacks, increased hospital admissions, and increased emergency room visits.³ For Hispanics in the United States, the impacts of climate change on health can be particularly pronounced due to this population's disproportionate exposure to pollutants:

- Nearly 1 in 2 Hispanic Americans live in counties that frequently violate air quality standards (ground-level ozone standards).⁴
- 39% of Hispanics live within 30 miles of a power plant, the main source of ozone and PM pollution.⁵
- Hispanics are more than twice as likely as whites to visit the emergency room for asthma.⁶

Climate Change and Children

Children are at a higher risk of negative health effects from carbon pollution and climate change, including respiratory disease and asthma attacks, in part because the body's ability to fight off infection is still developing in younger bodies.⁷ In the United States alone:

- Hispanic children are 40% more likely to die from asthma than are non-Hispanic whites.⁸
- 14% of Hispanic children have been diagnosed with asthma.⁹
- Worldwide, 55 million children live in areas where the "monitored air quality places them at risk for premature death, aggravated asthma, difficulty breathing, cardiovascular harm, and lower birth weight."¹⁰

Climate change also endangers our children by making them more vulnerable to stronger storms, wildfires, and drought that can negatively impact their health and wellbeing.

Added Challenges in Healthcare

The impacts of climate on Hispanic health are further exacerbated by challenges to adequate healthcare and medical resources. According to the US Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, Hispanics adults are 30% more likely to be admitted to the hospital for asthma than are non-Hispanic whites.¹¹ Additionally:

- Minority children are less likely than white children to be prescribed or take recommended treatments to control their asthma, and are less likely to attend outpatient appointments.¹²
- Hispanics who have an asthma emergency that sends them to the ER or hospital are less likely to receive follow-up care or an asthma action plan.¹³
- Among racial and ethnic groups, Hispanics account for the largest share of the uninsured, including 12.6 million adults and nearly 3 million children as of 2011.¹⁴

What to Do as a Healthcare Professional?

As a healthcare professional, you are on the front lines of addressing the negative health impacts of climate change – but better than addressing symptoms is addressing the underlying causes of disease. This is why **addressing climate change is among the best preventative health measures for minimizing the negative health outcomes associated with climate change.**

This year, the Environmental Protection Agency took unprecedented action to limit carbon pollution from power plants. While there are already limits set for arsenic, mercury, and lead pollution, EPA's proposed Clean Power Plan would be the first time we've put a national limit on the carbon pollution that drives climate change and affects public health. For more information on this historic effort to address climate change, see EDF's website: <http://www.edf.org/climate/a-new-federal-clean-power-plan>.

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