

# Climate Change Needs to Be Tackled for Better Health, Medical Groups Urge



by MAGGIE FOX  
MAR 15 2017

Heatstroke. Asthma. Zika. Climate change is helping illness and disease spread and become more common, a new consortium of medical groups said Wednesday.

It's not just extreme heat and flooding, but more intense storms — including blizzards — and a steady warming trend that lets disease-carrying mosquitoes thrive, the new Medical Society Consortium on Climate Health said.

The best answer? Cleaner energy, the consortium said, including agreements to cut carbon dioxide emissions and develop solar and wind power.

"We believe the most important action we can take to protect our health is to accelerate the inevitable transition to clean renewable energy," the group of 11 medical societies, which includes pediatricians, gynecologists and infectious disease specialists, said in a statement.

To that end, the consortium is launching a coordinated public relation push of their agenda, including efforts to recruit hometown doctors to tell stories of climate-linked illness and injury.

“Doctors in every part of our country see that climate change is making Americans sicker,” said Dr. Mona Sarfaty, director of the Center for Climate Change Communication at George Mason University and the head of the new consortium.

A Contra Costa County worker uses a blower to kill off mosquito larvae found in a retention pond in Bay Point, California, in 2015. Justin Sullivan / Getty Images, file

“Physicians are on the front lines and see the impacts in exam rooms. What’s worse is that the harms are felt most by children, the elderly, Americans with low-income or chronic illnesses, and people in communities of color,” Sarfaty added in a statement.

It’s hardly a new idea that climate change can affect human health. The Obama White House issued a report saying rising temperatures were making allergies worse and causing more heat-related deaths. The World Health Organization has issued several warnings, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has a program dedicated to climate and health

But health experts are worried that the new administration of Donald Trump is not just less worried about the problem, but might be downright hostile to efforts to slow the human impact on climate change.

There was more than a little suspicion that the cancellation of a CDC-sponsored meeting on climate change last month was a response to fears about what the new boss might think.

The new group wants to press forward from a medical perspective.

“The reality of human-caused climate change is no longer a matter of debate,” they say in a report released with the launch Wednesday.

“These harms include heat-related illness, worsening chronic illnesses, injuries and deaths from dangerous weather events, infectious diseases spread by mosquitoes and ticks, illnesses from contaminated food and water, and mental health problems,” the report adds.

“Unless we take concerted action, these harms to our health are going to get much worse. The sooner we take action, the more harm we can prevent, and the more we can protect the health of all Americans.”

“Here’s the message from America’s doctors on climate change: it’s not only happening in the Arctic Circle; it’s happening here. It’s not only a problem for us in 2100; it’s a problem now. And it’s not only hurting polar bears; it’s hurting us,” said Sarfaty.

The full group:

- American Academy of Allergy, Asthma, Immunology (AAAAI)
- American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP);

- American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP);
- American College of Physicians (ACP);
- American College of Preventive Medicine (ACPM);
- American Congress of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG);
- American Geriatrics Society;
- American Podiatric Medical Association (APMA);
- Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA);
- National Medical Association (NMA);
- Society of General Internal Medicine (SGIM).