

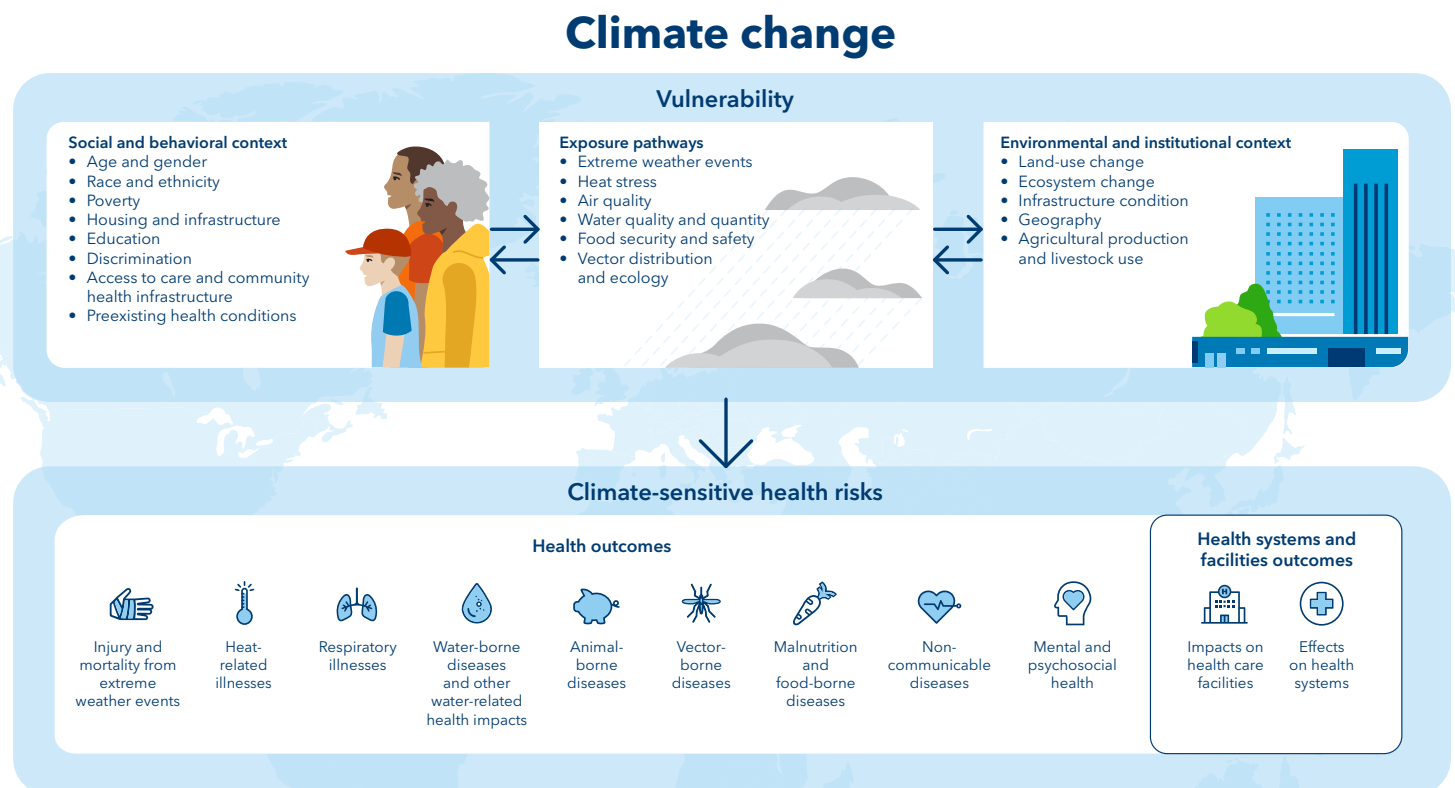
# Climate change and health are interconnected

## How does climate change impact health?

Climate change is already affecting health in many ways. People are increasingly experiencing heat waves, wildfires, poor air quality, floods, and droughts as a result of the changes happening to our weather and planet.

The health impacts of climate change include new or worsening lung and heart disease, injuries and deaths due to extreme weather, and an increase in allergies and infectious diseases. Climate change also affects mental and emotional health, including stress and anxiety related to extreme weather events. In addition, climate change can disrupt other factors that are key to good health, such as financial security, equality, and access to health care and social support.<sup>1</sup>

The World Health Organization has declared climate change to be the single biggest threat to human health on the planet.



**Adaptation of World Health Organization and Environmental Protection Agency graphics**  
Overview of climate-sensitive health risks, their exposure factors, and social/behavioral and environmental/institutional context.

<sup>1</sup> World Health Organization. "Climate Change and Health." World Health Organization, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>.

# Climate change and health are interconnected

## Why is climate change a health equity issue?<sup>2</sup>

### The root causes of climate change and health inequities are often the same.

Health equity means that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. Unfortunately, social factors such as race and socioeconomic class mean individuals and communities face different obstacles to achieving good health.

The effects of climate change can worsen these disparities, adding to differences in health for underserved communities in the United States. These differences include poor living conditions, racism and other forms of discrimination, and psychological stresses.

### The effects of climate change on health are not equally or fairly distributed.

Our health and the environment we live in can differ by geographic location, race, ethnicity, and income. Communities that have experienced centuries of disinvestment, discriminatory practices and policies, and structural racism are more likely to be adversely affected by the impacts of climate change. This includes our country's most vulnerable and historically disadvantaged groups, including women, children, ethnic minorities, poor communities, migrants or displaced persons, older people, and those with underlying health conditions. Historically disadvantaged communities typically face more extreme climate conditions due to their location and lack of investments in their neighborhoods.

### Empowering communities is essential to building climate resilience.

To be able to handle the effects of climate change and strengthen communities, it is especially important for disadvantaged, low-income communities and communities of color to be empowered to take action. It is crucial that communities are included in solving the problems that directly affect them.

## How can we help?

Everyone can do their part to stop the worst potential effects of climate change, help their communities become better prepared for extreme events, and work toward a healthier, more sustainable future. One of the most important things that we can all do right now is start the conversation about the urgency of climate change as a health issue.



### Additional resources on the health effects of climate change:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [Climate Effects on Health](#)
- Health and Human Services' [Climate Change and Health Equity](#)
- The Commonwealth Fund's [The Impact of Climate Change on Our Health and Health Systems](#)



### Tips to guide meaningful conversations with your friends, families, and communities:

- ecoAmerica's [5 Steps to Effective Climate Communication](#)
- ecoAmerica's [Climate Solutions for Your Community](#)
- Yale Program on Climate Change Communication's [Climate Opinion Tools and Visualizations](#)

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Rudolph, L., Harrison, C., Buckley, L. & North, S. (2018). Climate Change, Health, and Equity: A Guide for Local Health Departments. Oakland, Calif. and Washington D.C., Public Health Institute and American Public Health Association.