



Direct and indirect health effects of climate change on older people

Climate change and health

Climate change is significantly impacting the health of older people, both directly and indirectly. Understanding these effects is crucial for promoting resilience and adapting healthcare services.



Direct effects

- **Heatwaves and extreme temperatures:** older adults are more susceptible to heat-related illnesses, such as heatstroke and dehydration, due to impaired thermoregulation.
- **Cold waves & hypothermia:** hypothermia can cause the heart and respiratory system to fail and eventually can lead to death.
- **Extreme weather events:** increased frequency of floods, storms, and wildfires can lead to injuries, displacement, and increased stress levels among older populations.
- **Respiratory issues:** air pollution exacerbated by climate change, including wildfire smoke and increased particulate matter, can lead to respiratory problems, particularly in those with pre-existing conditions like COPD or asthma.



Indirect effects

- **Vector-borne diseases:** rising temperatures and altered precipitation patterns expand the habitat of vectors (e.g., mosquitoes), increasing the risk of diseases like dengue and West Nile virus, which can be severe for older people.
- **Food and water security:** climate change impacts agriculture and water supplies, leading to potential malnutrition and increased risk of food-borne illnesses.
- **Healthcare system disruptions:** extreme weather events can disrupt healthcare delivery, complicating access to medications and treatments for chronic conditions



Specific vulnerabilities of older people

- **Frailty and chronic conditions:** older individuals often have multiple chronic conditions, making them more vulnerable to the health impacts of climate change.
- **Social isolation:** increased heat or extreme weather can limit mobility, exacerbating social isolation and mental health issues among older adults.
- **Cognitive impairment:** individuals with dementia or cognitive impairments are at higher risk during extreme events, as they may struggle with adaptation and evacuation.

