American Lung Association.

Air Quality, Climate Change & Your Health

Climate change puts everyone's health at risk. Over the past century, human activity has increased greenhouse gas emissions, which drive climate change. Our warming climate means that we experience more frequent and intense heat events and an overall warming trend. This results in an array of changes that impact our health. Learning about its impacts on your lungs can help you protect yourself and your family.

Climate Impact	What Can I Do About It?
Air Pollution Climate change increases the risk that air pollution, including ground-level ozone and particle pollution, will worsen. Exposure to ozone pollution and particle pollution can cause an array of health harms, including coughing, wheezing and asthma attacks.	• **Check air quality levels** at AirNow.gov and adjust your activities when pollution levels are high. • **Wear an N95 mask** during poor air quality days and take any prescribed allergy medications as directed. • **Know when to seek medical attention**. Watch for these warning signs: ○ Wheezing ○ Shortness of breath ○ Difficulty taking a full breath ○ Chest heaviness ○ Lightheadedness ○ Dizziness ○ Fatigue
Extreme Heat Extreme heat events are becoming more frequent, intense and long-lasting. They occur when the temperature reaches extremely high levels or when the combination of heat and humidity causes the air to become oppressive.	• **Drink plenty of fluids** to prevent dehydration. If you take medications, consult your healthcare provider about any additional risks. • If your home does not have **air conditioning**, locate a public air-conditioned space such as a shopping mall or library for the hottest part of the day (typically 3 p.m. - 5 p.m.). • **Watch for signs of heat-related illnesses** such as heat cramps, heat exhaustion and heat stroke. • **Avoid using electric fans to cool down** when temperatures exceed 95°F. Instead, take a cool shower or bath. • **Wear lightweight, loose-fitting clothing**. • **Limit strenuous activities and pace yourself**. *Note: If you are living with asthma, COPD or another chronic lung disease, the rising heat and humidity can also make breathing more difficult.*
Allergens Changes in our climate are making allergy symptoms worse. Rising temperatures cause plants to produce more pollen and extend allergy seasons, leading to increased itching, sneezing and asthma exacerbations. Warmer conditions also allow allergen-producing plants to thrive in new areas, exposing more people to pollen.	• **Manage symptoms by monitoring, reducing and avoiding allergens**. Keeping pollen, dust and mold out of your home can help minimize exposure. • If you have allergies, work with your healthcare provider or allergist to **identify your specific triggers**. Check daily pollen levels through a weather app or the National Allergy Bureau. • **During pollen season, keep windows and doors closed at home and in your car**. After spending time outdoors, take a shower, wash your hair and change clothes to remove allergens.

Climate Impact	What Can I Do About It?
Wildfires Drier, hotter conditions that lead to longer wildfire seasons and more destructive fires. The risks of serious health issues aren't limited to those in wildfire-prone areas—smoke can travel thousands of miles, affecting air quality far from the source. Wildfires also force evacuations, making it difficult for people to access medications, medical devices and essential healthcare services.	• **Before a wildfire** occurs, create an evacuation plan with multiple routes and share it with family and friends. Sign up for local emergency alerts to stay informed about fire activity and air quality in your area. • **During a wildfire**, remain indoors unless evacuation is required. Keep windows, doors and vents closed, and set your air conditioner to recirculate to prevent smoke from entering. Use a portable air cleaner to improve indoor air quality. • **After a wildfire**, take precautions to reduce exposure to hazardous particles. Wet dusty or sooty areas before cleaning to prevent airborne debris. If asbestos or other hazardous materials may be present, avoid disturbing the area and seek professional assistance.

Hurricanes, Storms & Flooding
The increasing frequency and intensity of storms and flooding events create dangerous situations for those affected. Health harms can continue or even increase after flooding and storms subside.
	• **Before a Flood**
	  ○ Create a disaster plan and share it with your healthcare providers, family, friends, schools and daycare centers to ensure you're prepared.
	• **During the Flood**
	  ○ Evacuate if directed.
	  ○ Avoid contact with floodwaters. Floodwaters can contain sewage, chemicals and debris, increasing the risk of infections and illness.
	  ○ Avoid contact with standing water. Standing water is a breeding ground for bacteria, viruses and mold.
	• **Returning Home After the Flood**
	  ○ After a flood, wait for emergency officials to confirm that it is safe before returning home. Once inside, check for contamination and assess the water damage. When discarding damaged materials, wear protective gear to minimize exposure to hazardous debris and contaminants.

Speak with your healthcare provider about any respiratory symptoms you are experiencing, and seek medical attention if your usual treatments are not providing relief.

Visit **Lung.training** to access "Climate and Health Basics," a free, one-hour learning module to learn more about how climate change affects health and actions that can be taken to reduce the risk.

Email your questions to **HelpLineInfo@Lung.org** or call toll free at **866-252-2959**.

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