



MOMS
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FORCE

ELDER'S
CLIMATE
ACTION

CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE HEALTH OF OLDER ADULTS

Climate change is a public health emergency that is harming Americans now. Older adults are especially vulnerable to harm from climate change. Adults 65 and over make up 16% of the US population, and the nation is growing older. Older adults are expected to outnumber children under age 18 for the first time in US history by 2035.



DECLINING AIR QUALITY

Rising temperatures increase the formation of ground level ozone, or smog, which can worsen respiratory conditions such as asthma, lung infections, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Climate change is also increasing the frequency and severity of wildfires.

EXTREME WEATHER VIOLENCE

Climate change increases the likelihood of extreme weather events, such as heavy rainfall, cold snaps, drought, and wildfire. These weather events in turn can cause flooding, electricity outages, and damage to essential infrastructure such as roads and sewage systems. Older adults are more likely to suffer storm and flood-related fatalities, as well as intestinal disease caused by sewage system failure.

HEAT

Climate change is increasing the global average temperature. Scientists estimate that greenhouse gas emissions from power plants, transportation, industry, and other sources has increased global average temperature by 1.9° F since 1880. Extreme heat is stressful for everyone, but for those who are older and possibly frail, the effects can be more dangerous.

DISEASES CARRIED BY TICKS AND MOSQUITOES

A warming world alters the habitat and lifecycle of insects, such as the ticks that carry Lyme disease and the mosquitoes that carry West Nile virus. Scientists predict that incidence of malaria and Dengue fever, among other vector borne illnesses, will likely increase as pathogens enter previously uninfected areas.



Older adults have certain risk factors that make them more vulnerable to climate change.

LIMITED MOBILITY

Older adults are more vulnerable to heat stroke because of limited mobility, which makes it harder to get out of the heat to cooling centers, libraries, or other air conditioned locations. It's also harder for them to get out of the way during extreme weather events such as floods and wildfires.

UNDERLYING HEALTH CONDITIONS

Underlying health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, and Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) can make it harder for people to handle additional health stressors like heat, evacuation, and smog. Older adults are more likely to have such underlying conditions, which makes them vulnerable to harmful impacts from climate change.



COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENT AND MENTAL HEALTH DECLINE

Any kind of cognitive problem can make it harder to decide what to do. This increases the risk that older adults may not recognize the warning signs of a dangerous heat wave or extreme rain event, or may not exercise proper judgement about what to do in an emergency.



LIFE-DEPENDENT RELIANCE ON ELECTRICITY

Older adults are more likely to rely on refrigerated medication; need medical interventions that use electricity (such as oxygen); or require a motorized scooter, wheelchair, or elevator. Power failures due to extreme weather events are a growing risk from climate change. These interruptions in electricity supply can be especially harmful to older adults.

SPECIAL VULNERABILITY TO HEAT

In addition to being more frail as a group, older adults are more likely to be taking medications that interfere with the body's ability to regulate heat. This increases the danger of heat exhaustion and heat stroke from high heat days and heat waves.

SOCIAL ISOLATION

Older adults face increasing social isolation, which makes it harder to ask for help in an emergency. This can leave them more vulnerable to the health effects of climate change.

July 2019 Sources: momscleanairforce.org/sources-elderclimate

We have a responsibility to protect older adults from the climate crisis. It is urgent that our leaders take decisive, bold action to eliminate the pollution causing climate change. The health of our elders depends on it.