



Australian Institute of Environmental Health

... our environment, our health, our future

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Media Release

World Health Day 2008: protecting health from climate change.

The theme of World Health Day, held on Monday 7 April 2008, is 'protecting health from climate change'.

Around the world climate change is likely to impact on our most basic needs – safe drinking water, sufficient food and secure shelter.

The severity of natural disasters is likely to increase, which is a particularly sombre thought considering approximately 600,000 deaths worldwide were attributed to weather-related natural disasters in the 1990s⁽¹⁾. Following a disaster, reduced access to safe drinking water and food, decreased standards of sanitation, the increased presence of disease-carrying vectors such as mosquitoes, and other issues increase the risks to human health and well-being.

Changed weather patterns can lead to changes in rainfall patterns which effects food production and access to water for drinking, food preparation and sanitation. Many diseases are sensitive to climatic conditions, so changes in standard temperatures will alter the incidence and distribution of particular diseases. An increase in temperature may make it more viable for some water-borne diseases to survive and for vectors such as disease-carrying mosquitoes to become established in areas where they don't currently exist. Extremes in temperature can also increase death rates as was seen during the heatwave in the 2003 European Summer in which at least 27,000 more people died than during equivalent times in other years⁽²⁾. Altered weather patterns can also 'trap' air pollutants over cities, increasing the rate of exposure leading to an increase in respiratory illness and premature deaths. Rising sea levels will also displace significant populations around the world.

Environmental health focuses on how the built and natural environment affects human health. It is clear the environmental impacts of climate change will have significant effects on human health, which is why the Australian Institute of Environmental Health (AIEH) is concerned about the issue. As a result, the AIEH supports the inclusion of 'climate change and adaptation' and 'preparedness for emergencies and capacity to respond' as two of the six priority areas in the National Environmental Health Strategy 2007-2012 produced by the Australian Government⁽³⁾.

The AIEH is also hosting the International Federation of Environmental Health 10th World Congress on Environmental Health in Brisbane from 11-16 May 2008. One of the Congress themes is 'climate change and environmental health'. During the Congress environmental health professionals from around the world will consider the environmental health impacts of climate change, disaster management and similar issues.

Events such as 'Earth Hour' which was held on 29 March 2008 and World Health Day, being held on 7 April 2008, are important in raising community awareness and initiating action. But in order to minimise the impacts of climate change on human health, it is important for governments, corporations, organisations and individuals to take long-term action. That is why the AIEH is encouraging everyone to remember that it is '*... our environment, our health, our future*'.

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Relevant publications and resources:

- World Health Day:
 - World Health Organisation (WHO): <http://www.who.int/world-health-day/en/index.html>
- Climate change impacts on health:
 - CSIRO 'Climate Change in the Asia/Pacific Region'
: <http://www.csiro.au/files/files/p9xj.pdf>
 - Human Health and Climate Change in Oceania: a risk assessment':
http://nceph.anu.edu.au/Staff_Students/Staff_pdf_papers/Rosalie_Woodruff/Health_Climate_Change_Impact_Assessment_2002.pdf
- International Foundation of Environmental Health (IFEH) World Congress:
 - IFEH 2008: <http://www.ifeh2008.org/index.php>

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1. World Health Organisation 2005, *Climate and health*.
<http://www.who.int/globalchange/news/fsclimandhealth/en/index.html>
2. World Health Organisation 2005, *Climate and health*.
<http://www.who.int/globalchange/news/fsclimandhealth/en/index.html>
3. enHealth 2007, *National Environmental Health Strategy 2007-2012*.
[http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/798726839F2B2FA6CA2572D40008D566/\\$File/enHealth%20NEHS%20final%20for%20web%20Nov%202007.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/798726839F2B2FA6CA2572D40008D566/$File/enHealth%20NEHS%20final%20for%20web%20Nov%202007.pdf)