

American Academy of Pediatrics links global warming to the health of children

October 26 2015

Today, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) released a policy statement that links climate change with the health of children, urging pediatricians and politicians to work together to solve this crisis and protect children from climate-related threats including natural disasters, heat stress, lower air quality, increased infections, and threats to food and water supplies.

"Every child need a safe and healthy environment and [climate change](#) is a rising public [health](#) threat to all [children](#) in this country and around the world," said AAP President Sandra G. Hassink, MD, FAAP.

"Pediatricians have a unique and powerful voice in this conversation due to their knowledge of child health and disease and their role in ensuring the health of current and future children."

The [policy statement](#), "Global Climate Change and Children's Health," updates a 2007 policy, and is being published in the November 2015 issue of *Pediatrics* (published online Oct. 26). In the 2015 policy statement, the AAP states that:

- There is wide consensus among scientific organizations and climatologists that the broad effects known commonly as "climate change" are the result of contemporary human activities.
- According to the World Health Organization, more than 88 percent of the existing burden of disease attributable to climate change occurs in children younger than 5 years old.
- Climate change poses a threat to human health and safety, but

children are uniquely vulnerable.

- Failure to take prompt, substantive action would be an act of injustice to all children.

"Children are uniquely at risk to the direct impacts of climate changes like climate-related disaster—including floods and storms—where they are exposed to increased risk of injury, death, loss of or separation from caregivers and mental health consequences," explained Samantha Ahdoot, MD, lead author of the policy statement. "They are also more vulnerable to the secondary impacts of global warming, like disease. For example, Lyme disease affects approximately 300,000 Americans each year, with boys, ages 5 to 9, at greatest risk. Climate warming has been linked to northern expansion of Lyme disease in North America, putting more American children at risk of this disease."

A technical report accompanies the AAP policy statement and offers a review of the latest scientific evidence linking climate change to [child health](#), development, wellbeing and nutrition. Highlights include:

- Infants less than one year of age are uniquely vulnerable to heat-related mortality, with one study projecting an increase in infant heat-related deaths by 5.5 percent in females and 7.8 percent in males by the end of the 21st Century.
- Climate influences a number of infectious diseases that affect children across the world, including malaria, dengue fever, West Nile virus, Chikungunya, Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, diarrheal illness, Amebic Meningoencephalitis and Coccidioidomycosis.
- The number of deaths in American high school and college football players from heat stroke has doubled from 15 to 29 from 2000-2010.
- There is an emerging concern that increased atmospheric CO₂ impacts grain quality, lowering the protein content of the edible

portions of wheat, rice and barley.

- High rates of post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms have been found in children following climate-related disasters, including hurricanes and floods.
- Children in the world's poorest countries, where the disease burden is already disproportionately high, are most affected by climate change.
- In 2030, climate change is projected to cause an additional 48,000 deaths attributable to diarrheal disease in children younger than 15 years old, primarily in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

The policy also advocates for the promotion of resource efficiency and renewable energy, research on climate-associated health effects, education and public awareness on this critical issue, and green development and transit. The AAP calls for a new public health movement to educate, advocate, and collaborate with local and national leaders regarding the risks climate change poses to human health. Pediatricians, as advocates for the population most vulnerable to climate change health effects, have a vital role to play in this movement.

Provided by American Academy of Pediatrics

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