

# Doctors get tips on how to make health care greener

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Cutting nitrous oxide waste in hospitals, switching to reusable vaginal speculums for cervical screening, and prescribing tablets over intravenous drugs are just some of the tangible actions doctors can take

to reduce the carbon footprint of health care.

If global health care were a country it would rank fifth in the world for greenhouse gas emissions. A new series launched by *BMJ* today offers a range of ideas, with practical tips on making health care systems more sustainable.

Each article details one action or project that frontline clinicians can implement, backed by a rapidly growing evidence base, to reduce the carbon footprint of their work.

Readers can also use a linked interactive [tool](#) to find actions relevant to their own role and workplace.

"The [climate crisis](#) is a health crisis, and health care professionals are on the frontline," write Florence Wedmore and colleagues in an editorial to launch the series. "Clinicians want to know how they can help slow this crisis and we aim to showcase solutions that are within the power of individuals."

Previous studies show that carbon can be saved by switching [asthma patients](#) to dry powder inhalers, replacing [single-use](#) face masks with reusable options of equivalent protection, and changing prescribing habits, which also saves money and reduces harm to patients.

Other achievable actions linked to lower [greenhouse gas emissions](#) include:

- Using smaller or fewer pre-packed surgical trays during operations to avoid re-sterilizing unused instruments
- Switching from single use plastic speculums for [cervical screening](#) to reusable stainless steel versions
- Choosing oral over intravenous medications to reduce the impact

of manufacturing, using, and disposing of equipment and packaging

- Changing the dose and frequency of iron supplements in line with the latest recommendations to benefit patients and help mitigate environmental harms
- Reviewing nitrous oxide loss and waste to help cut consumption in hospitals

"The *BMJ* has long recognized the seriousness of the climate emergency, and campaigned to cut [carbon emissions](#) within health care and beyond," say Wedmore and colleagues. "That campaign is now shifting towards concrete actions that health care professionals can and must take in response to this emergency."

"We hope the new series will help many more clinicians realize the benefits of more sustainable health care for patients and the planet."

**More information:** Florence Wedmore et al, Sustainable practice: what can I do?, *BMJ* (2023). [DOI: 10.1136/bmj.p2461](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.p2461)

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