Protecting Children from the Effects of Climate Change

American Academy of Pediatrics
DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™

The following Op-Ed can be modified and sent to those in your community. For tips on writing your own op-ed, click <u>here.</u>

Sample Op-Ed

To the Editor:

Imagine a world where children cannot breathe clean air, play outside in the summer, obtain nutritious food, and where they are displaced from their homes [<u>Insert local conditions</u>]. Sounds like a scary post-apocalyptic movie, doesn't it? Yet, this is the world we live in today because of the effects of a changing climate. Extreme weather conditions such as excessive heat, drought, hurricanes, wildfires, and rising sea levels are all signs that the climate is changing. These changes are taking an increasingly high toll on the health of children each year and we must act now to protect them.

The <u>Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change</u> (IPCC), an international scientific body that serves as the leading authority on climate change, recognizes that humans are a major contributor to the warming of the atmosphere. Greenhouse gas emissions, such as carbon dioxide, are often found in electricity production, transportation (e.g. fossil fuels), industry, and agriculture, causing the atmosphere to retain heat.

While climate change is indisputably real, it is often difficult to understand its direct effects on health. Unfortunately, children are especially vulnerable to the effects of climate change as they breathe more air and consume more calories in proportion to their body weight than adults, which lead to greater exposure to pollutants. Children are uniquely susceptible to specific pollutants and toxins during various developmental stages and have less-developed immune systems for fighting off infections. As a local pediatrician, I see an increasing number of children suffering from asthma attacks, heat exhaustion, and extended seasonal allergies each year. The reality is that poor air quality, produced in part by climate change, is playing a role in the health of some children for whom I care. I have also seen an increase in many infectious diseases that are transmitted by tics and mosquitoes, including Lyme disease, West Nile virus, and Zika virus. Additional health effects are experienced when families are forced to evacuate their homes due to weather conditions and the children often experience post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety.

So, what can we do? Because climate change is already harming children, it is up to us to make changes to ensure a healthy planet for children today and in the future. Everyone can make simple changes to their daily activities to help mitigate the effects, including: reducing fossil fuel use by walking or carpooling, choosing clean energy such as wind and solar power, eating less meat and more local produce, and planting trees and other plants. Also important is taking a stand on the issue. Educate yourself on climate change, and then educate others. Support policies that protect against climate change, such as the Clean Power Plan and demand that further action be taken. Vote for local, state, and federal candidates who support policies that are in favor of clean energy and commit to taking action.

Join me in making changes to ensure that our children's environment is protected. Because all children deserve better; they deserve the best.

Name
Email