



THE OFFICIAL NEWSMAGAZINE OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

# AAP News

## News Articles, AAP National Conference & Exhibition 2017, Environmental Health

### Action Needed on 'Climate Crisis' to Protect Children's Health

by Melissa Jenco, News Content Editor

**Editor's note:** *The 2017 AAP National Conference & Exhibition will take place from Sept. 16-19 in Chicago.*

Climate change is taking a toll on children's health, and pediatricians play a role in educating policymakers on the impact.

We are facing a "climate crisis," said plenary speaker Jonathan Patz, MD, MPH, professor and John P. Holton Chair of Health and the Environment at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

"One of the reasons I think climate change poses our greatest public health threat is that there are so many exposure pathways through which climate change affects our health," he said.

Climate change is leading to heat waves, air pollution, increases in vector-borne and water-borne diseases, floods, droughts, and extreme weather events that impact both physical and mental health.

About 88% of the disease burden caused by climate change affects children under 5 years, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

"Pediatricians are essential for communicating that action on climate is action for health," Dr. Patz said.

He and his colleagues studied temperatures in eastern U.S. cities and found that most will triple their number of days over 90 degrees Fahrenheit by mid-century. The Earth as a whole is expected to warm by 7 degrees Celsius by 2100.

Higher temperatures are linked to more severe weather, rising sea levels and stressed food crops. They also lead to more ragweed and pollen, bad news for children with asthma.

Heat also plays a role in the spread of mosquito-borne diseases like dengue and Zika virus. The countries most impacted by Zika were experiencing record temperatures.

"The climatic conditions made Zika transmission extremely suitable," Dr. Patz said. "Even though climate is not the full story of Zika, it is a majorly enabling story."

Another environmental concern is air pollution, which leads to more than 7 million premature deaths each year, according to the WHO. Dr. Patz said removing 1 ton of carbon dioxide costs \$30 but saves \$200 in health costs.

Dr. Patz encouraged cities to change their transportation habits, which can improve air quality, reduce asthma and lower obesity rates.

"Swapping tailpipes for pedals, small changes, pay huge dividends for public health and the economy," he said.

He is heartened by seeing cities start to make these changes and by commitments to action like those in the Paris climate accord.

"The good news," he said, "is we are at a different time in our recognition that climate change is real, it's dangerous and the world needs to come together and do something about it."

For more coverage of the AAP National Conference & Exhibition visit <http://bit.ly/2vm1VUU> and follow AAPNews on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).



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