

Health & Wellbeing

March – Climate and health



Climate change

Climate change is caused by increases in the amount of greenhouse gases (such as carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide) in the atmosphere, which cause the earth's average temperature to rise. Greenhouse gases trap heat in the atmosphere, raising air and sea temperatures. They are primarily produced through the burning of fossil fuels (like coal) for electricity generation, as well as through agricultural, mining, land management and transport practices.

The effects of climate change are already being felt – air and sea temperatures are increasing and leading to changes in rainfall patterns, more frequent and increasingly severe extreme weather events and sea level rise. Victoria is already warmer and drier, and the CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology predict that this trend will continue. This means there are likely to be more severe droughts, more heatwaves and increased bushfire activity.



Health effects of climate change

Our health is closely linked to the environment we live in. Climate change has been described by the World Health Organization as the biggest threat to health in the 21st century – it affects health and wellbeing in many ways:

- Directly, by the increased intensity and frequency of extreme weather events (such as heatwaves, floods and bushfires).
- Indirectly, through worsening air quality, changes in the spread of infectious diseases, threats to food and water and effects on mental health.

- Climate change will also impact certain parts of the economy with increased unemployment, financial stress, food insecurity, and rising social inequalities.

Actions to reduce your contribution to climate change

There are plenty of positive things you can do to help slow or reduce climate change, which will also benefit your health, including:

- Increasing your use of ‘active transport’ (such as walking and cycling) can help to reduce your risk of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, some cancers, and musculoskeletal conditions.
- Reducing your reliance on cars by using active transport or public transport will improve air quality, which will help to reduce rates of lung cancer and other lung conditions (including asthma), heart disease and stroke.
- Eating a diet rich in plant-based foods, including fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds and whole grains, and with fewer animal-based foods is good for your health and the environment.
- As part of a well-balanced, regular diet and a healthy, active lifestyle, eating the recommended amount of fruit and vegetables for men and women every day can help you reduce obesity and maintain a healthy weight, lower your cholesterol and lower your blood pressure.
- Reducing your consumption of processed foods will help to reduce excess energy consumption and reduce the environmental impacts associated with these foods. Processed foods are generally high in saturated fat, added sugars or salt, take more energy to produce and are usually packaged, which contributes to landfill waste.
- Drinking tap water. Victoria has some of the world’s best drinking water. Drinking tap water over bottled water or sugary drinks is better for your health and the environment, and it’s a lot cheaper too.
- Cooling and heating your home efficiently will help you remain comfortable all year round, and save on energy.

