

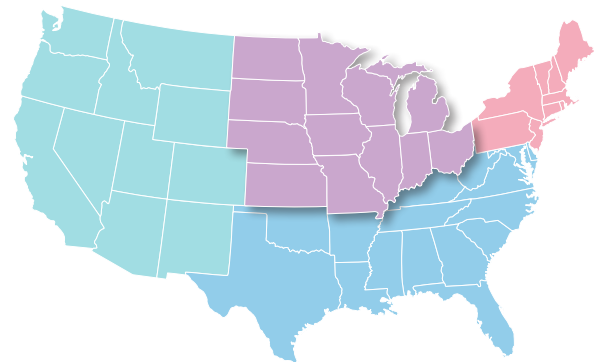
Focus on the Midwest

The U.S. must take rapid climate action to prioritize and protect health and equity, including a rapid transition away from the burning of fossil fuels.

The Midwest is experiencing the impacts of climate change, including heavy rains and flooding, extreme heat, and drought. Temperatures are rising across the region. Extreme precipitation is contributing to flooding of the Mississippi, Ohio, and Missouri rivers. Increased weather variability and unpredictability threatens agriculture, water security, and the Great Lakes.

Climate change is harming the health of communities across the Midwest

- **Flooding:** Heavy rainfall and flooding cause injuries, worsen mental health, increase water pollution, contaminate drinking water, increase gastrointestinal illnesses, and lead to higher exposure to mold and other harmful substances.
- **Water pollution:** Worsening storms and flooding lead to increased agricultural runoff and other pollution that contributes to algal blooms. Harmful algal blooms - such as those in Lake Erie - contaminate water with toxic cyanobacteria that can cause lung and gastrointestinal illness and damage the liver and kidneys.
- **Extreme Heat:** Extreme heat can cause heat exhaustion and heat stroke; contribute to poor pregnancy outcomes; harm lungs, kidneys, and hearts; worsen mental health; and contribute to higher crime rates and suicides. Extreme heat means lost labor hours for outdoor workers and fewer days children can safely play outside or participate in sports. People living in cities, low-income and rural communities, children, and outdoor workers are at especially high risk.
- **Poor air quality:** Air pollution harms health in many ways from damaging lungs and hearts, to causing poor birth outcomes, childhood asthma, and premature death. The Midwest region has poor air quality that is worsening due to factors like climate-intensified heat and wildfires. Pollen season is starting earlier and lasting longer - increasing allergies and asthma and other respiratory diseases. Children's health is especially harmed by air pollution.



- **Infectious disease:** Climate change is expanding the range of ticks and mosquitos that can carry infectious diseases such as Lyme disease.

Heavy rains and flooding are harming children's health

Rain and flooding result in overflows of combined sewage systems - flooding homes, schools, and lakes with sewage. When this leads to basement flooding it is not only costly but can also expose families to infectious diseases, and mold, which can increase the risk of asthma in children.

Climate change deepens health inequities from discriminatory policies

Everyone's health is at risk from climate change, but some communities bear a greater burden. Decades of racially-biased policies including structural discrimination in housing, zoning, and industrial and transportation infrastructure put certain communities at higher risk of the health harms from air pollution and climate change. Black, Latinx, Alaskan Native or American Indian, Asian American or Pacific Islander, and other people of color are more exposed to unhealthy levels of air pollution. Discriminatory policies also negatively impact the health of low-income communities and make it harder to adapt to the rapidly changing climate, deepening health inequities. People with certain medical conditions, outdoor workers, pregnant people, children, and the elderly are also at higher risk from climate change.

Midwest residents are worried about climate change and support climate action. The majority of adults in the region are worried about climate change. Over half of adults in the majority of the region's states believe Congress should do more to address climate change.¹

Action on climate change is critical to protect health and advance equity in the Midwest

Taking urgent action to address climate change today is one of the most important things policymakers can do to protect the health of residents in their states. The 2021 Lancet Countdown U.S. Policy Brief outlines three policy recommendations to highlight how health and equity can guide action on climate change:

- 1. Rapidly increase funding to protect people's health:** Make urgent investments in research and local solutions that reduce the health impacts of climate change and that prioritize health and equity.
- 2. Account for the health-related costs of burning fossil fuels in decision-making:** Incorporate health-related costs of fossil fuels into calculations of the social cost of carbon and climate change to guide policies that prioritize health equity.
- 3. Rapidly cut greenhouse gas emissions, especially in areas suffering most from fossil fuel-related air pollution:** Reduce U.S. greenhouse emissions by 57-62% of 2005 levels by 2030 with a goal of a near zero-emission economy by mid-century. Direct at least 40% of investments towards improving air quality in under-resourced communities.

The Lancet Countdown U.S. Brief is supported by a diverse group of health experts from over 70 U.S. organizations. This document is supported by data and recommendations from the 2021 Lancet Countdown U.S. Policy Brief and global report, and prior years' reports. Additional region-specific information was obtained from the the **Fourth National Climate Assessment**. The Midwest region includes: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

1. Yale Climate Opinion Maps 2020: <https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/visualizations-data/ycom-us/> (all states but North Dakota).