



National Association of
Pediatric Nurse PractitionersSM

NAPNAP Position Statement on the Effects of Climate Change on Children's Health: The Role of Pediatric-Focused Advanced Practice Registered Nurses

National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners *

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The National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners (NAPNAP) recognizes that climate change is a global crisis and health emergency that disproportionately affects children (Philipsborn & Chan, 2018), especially children of color and those in low-income communities (Reidmiller et al., 2018).

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Children are more vulnerable than adults to climate change because of their immature physiology, particularly their brains and other organs, bodies with large surface areas compared with weight, exploratory behaviors, and dependence on others for basic needs (Stanberry, Thomson, & James, 2018).

Children are at higher risk for injury and illness because of the effect of climate change on children's environments. One effect is worsening weather patterns associated with global warming, which is expected to lead to decreased crop production and the availability and affordability of nutritious foods leading to wasting and stunting of growth (Swinburn et al., 2019). In 2019, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reported that climate change is the number 1 global driver of undernutrition (Swinburn et al., 2019). The change in weather patterns has also resulted in worsening storms and rain events, thus increasing both infectious vector and water-borne diseases such as malaria, dengue, and cholera (Philipsborn & Chan, 2018; Walker, 2018). In addition, warming temperatures cause longer growing seasons and increases in pollen and molds, which leads to an increased incidence of asthma and allergic rhinitis (Poole et al., 2019).

Another serious effect of climate change is wildfires causing greenhouse gas emissions, airborne toxin release, and high levels of particulate matter, leading to increased respiratory infections and asthma exacerbations (Adetona et al., 2016; Reid et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2020). To add insult to the assault on children's physical health because of climate change, natural disasters caused by climate change are also associated with increased mental health problems in children, such as depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, and anxiety (Burke, Sanson, & Van Hoorn, 2018). The effects of climate change have been found to have a detrimental impact not only on physical and mental health but also academic achievement disproportionately affecting Black and Latino students in the United States (Park, Goodman, & Behrer, 2020).

Pediatric-focused advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) engage in culturally sensitive, family-focused care, addressing social determinants of health and providing expert clinical care. NAPNAP identifies that pediatric health care providers and pediatric-focused APRNs can address the issue of climate change by:

- 1 Educating themselves and the next generation of pediatric-focused APRNs regarding the health effects of climate change on the pediatric population (Kurth, 2017).
- 2 Improving health care provision through early identification of children and families facing the highest risk from climate change because of underlying health conditions, socioeconomic factors, or residence locations (Ziegler, Morelli, & Fawibe, 2017).
- 3 Advocating for children and youth in under-resourced communities, particularly immigrant, Black, and Latinx communities, who face the highest risks from climate change (Ziegler et al., 2017).
- 4 Collaborating with local organizations, health departments, and schools to develop primary, secondary, and tertiary public health interventions to prevent and address health impacts of climate change (Ebi et al., 2021; Tong & Ebi, 2019).
- 5 Advocating for improved urban planning and development of green spaces and planting trees to address the adverse impact of rising temperatures on poor urban populations (Lanza, Alcazar, Hoelscher, & Kohl, 2021).
- 6 Using interprofessional, community-centered approaches to collaborate with affected communities to respond to climate-related health crises and plan for future adaptations (Ebi & Hess, 2020).
- 7 Developing interprofessional approaches to care to support the resiliency and mental health of children and families impacted by climate change (Hayes, Blashki, Wiseman, Burke, & Reifels, 2018).
- 8 Initiating or participating in research regarding the impacts of climate change on child health (Kalogirou, Olson, & Davidson, 2020).

NAPNAP is an organization whose mission is to empower pediatric-focused APRNs and key partners to optimize child and family health and believes that responding to the adverse health impacts associated with climate change is an essential role for pediatric-focused APRNs and all health care providers who care for children and families.

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