

NON-INFECTIOUS DISEASES CAUSED BY THE RISK OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON EARTH

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Global climate change is expected to have broad health impacts. These could occur through various exposure pathways, such as the frequency or intensity of extreme heat waves, floods and droughts. Warmer air temperatures could also influence local and regional air pollutants and aeroallergens. Less direct health impacts may result from climate-related alteration of ecosystems or water and food supplies, which in turn could affect infectious disease incidence and nutritional status. Finally, sea level rise could potentially lead to massive population displacement and economic disruption. Some of the long-term and complex problems posed by climate change may not be readily discernible from other causal factors. Accordingly, expanded efforts are required in both classical and future-scenario-based risk assessment, to anticipate these problems. In addition, the many health impacts of climate change must be examined in the context of many other environmental and behavioural determinants of disease. Increased disease surveillance, integrated modelling and the use of geographically-based data systems will enable more anticipatory measures by the public-health and medical communities. There are clear ethical challenges. The regions with the greatest burden of climate-sensitive diseases are often the regions with the lowest capacity to adapt to the new risks.

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