



CLIMATE AND
HEALTH
ALLIANCE

MEDIA RELEASE

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New study shows rising health penalty from climate change

A new study released this month from the Union of Concerned Scientists suggests climate change is likely to cause dramatic increases in respiratory disease from ozone pollution.

This study *Rising Temperatures, Worsening Ozone Pollution* demonstrates the complex and increasing health risks associated with rising global average temperatures associated with climate change, according to Climate and Health Alliance Convenor Fiona Armstrong.

“This study is another important contribution in understanding the health consequences of failing to act on climate change,” Ms Armstrong said.

The UCS report reveals rising temperatures from global warming are contributing to increasing levels of ground level ozone pollution.*

Ozone affects the airways and lungs, causing inflammation and reduced function. Exposure to increased levels of ozone is associated with increased hospital admissions for pneumonia, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, asthma and other respiratory diseases, and with premature mortality.

As well as affecting people who are particularly sensitive to air pollution, such as children, asthmatics and the elderly, it can also affect the lungs of healthy people.

The UCS report suggests the health impact costs of the projected increase in ozone will cost the US \$5.4 billion each year by 2020, lead to one million missed school days, and almost 3 million additional acute respiratory attacks.

Ozone pollution is most severe in urban areas, where transport and industrial emissions cluster and temperatures tend to be higher due to ‘heat island’ effects. In rural areas, ozone negatively affects agriculture and may lead to declining crop yields.

Average global temperatures have increased more than 1°C over the past century and predictions indicate may reach 4°C by the end of the century under a high emissions scenario.

Australian research on the health effects of air pollution have supported those found in international studies, and significant health effects are already observed even at current levels of ozone in Australians cities.

“This study is yet another wake-up call regarding the adverse health effects of climate change and yet another reason why we must take urgent action to reduce emissions,” Ms Armstrong said.

*Ozone is a secondary pollutant formed through photochemical reactions involving nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds in the presence of sunlight and warm temperatures. Nitrogen oxides are produced by burning fossil fuels, and vehicle exhaust in a major source of volatile organic compounds in urban areas.

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