

# The Health Effects of Climate Change

## Introduction

- Climate change is often purely seen as an environmental issue but there are potential impacts on human health which are multiple, diverse and not all negative.
- Floods, droughts, heatwaves, changing disease patterns and migration will affect human health and place increased burdens on health-care systems.
- Climate change will also have major effects on the broader global environment, and so affect many other factors that are crucial to health.
- Changes are anticipated in resource availability, storage and transport options, need and demand for services and how services can be delivered.
- Health benefits may also occur from the changing climate in the UK, associated with warmer winters and people spending more time outdoors in the summer. Through careful planning these benefits can be maximised.

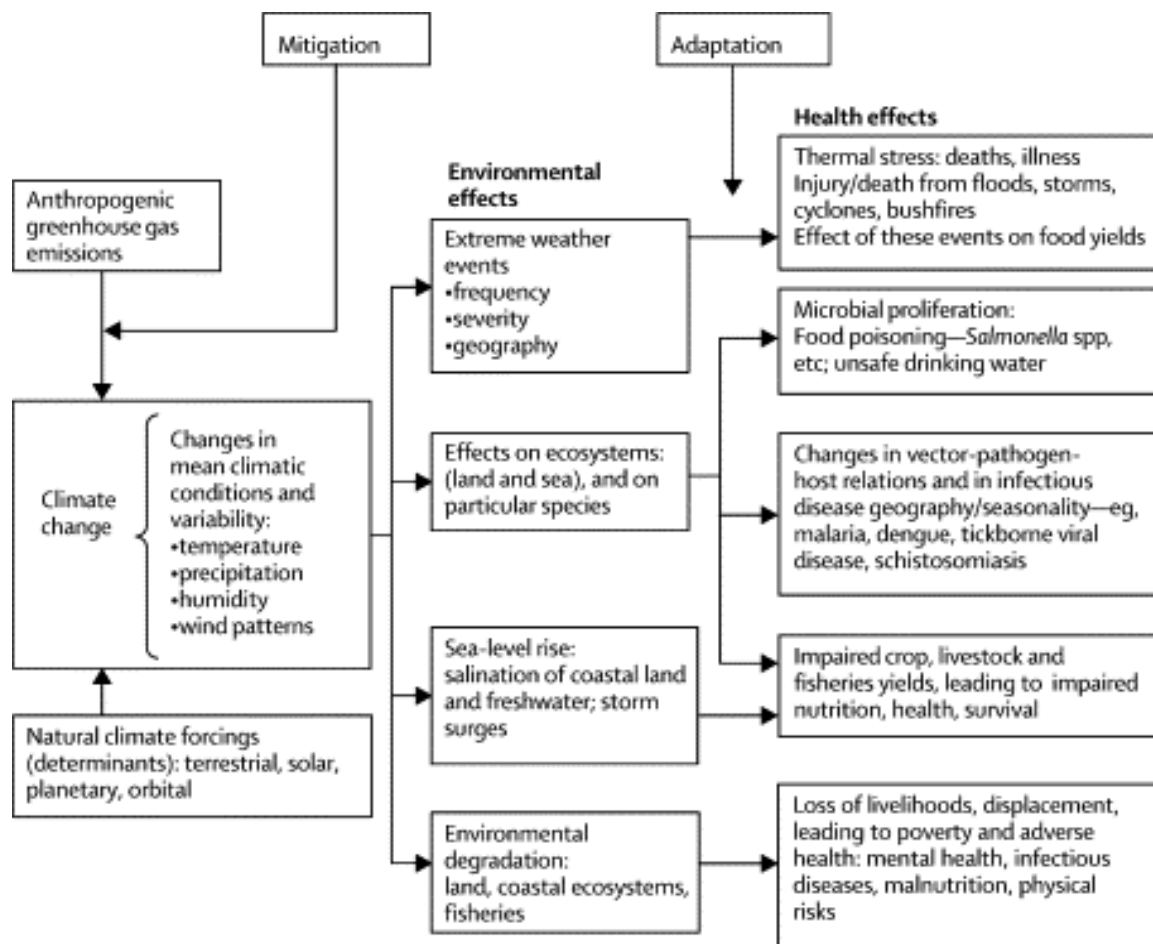
## Health Impacts of Climate Change in the UK

Hotter drier summers, milder wetter winters and more frequent extreme weather events such as flooding and heatwaves, as described in the UK Climate Projections 09 scenarios, could mean, in summary:

- a decrease in cold-related winter deaths and an increase in heat-related summer deaths;
- increased cases of food poisoning and insect-borne diseases; and
- increased cases of sunburn and skin cancer if people spend more time in the sun.

The expected health impacts of climate change in the UK include:

- Injuries and death caused by extreme weather-related events
- Heatwave-related health impacts
- Drought-related health impacts
- Increased incidence of sunburn and skin cancers
- Increased exposure to biting insects and vector-borne diseases
- Changing distribution of infectious diseases
- Increased food - and water-borne diseases
- Increased allergic conditions with extended pollen seasons and changing pollen distribution
- Respiratory and cardiovascular effects of increased particulate air pollution and ground-level ozone
- Flood-related health effects, such as mental health impacts
- Declining winter deaths
- Capacity impacts on the NHS from global environmental migration



McMichael et al. (2006) 'Climate change and human health: present and future risks', *The Lancet*, Volume 367, Issue 9513, p859 -869.

## Global Inter-dependence

Climate change is already affecting health globally. The effects of temperature increases on human health are already being observed and are expected to intensify existing disease burdens and health inequalities in the shorter term and global migration and the resulting pressures on health service capacity in the longer term.

Our global inter-dependence will result in us all being affected by the resulting global disruptions - conflict over resources (water, food, energy), loss of territory and environmental causes of migration.

## Further Reading

- Health Effects of Climate Change in the UK 2008  
[http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_080702](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_080702)
- Fit for the Future: Scenarios for low-carbon healthcare 2030  
[http://www.sdu.nhs.uk/documents/publications/1274105214\\_gmxj\\_fit\\_for\\_the\\_future\\_resource\\_handbook.pdf](http://www.sdu.nhs.uk/documents/publications/1274105214_gmxj_fit_for_the_future_resource_handbook.pdf)
- Heatwave plan for England: protecting health and reducing harm from extreme heat and heatwaves  
[http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_114430](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_114430)