

Improving health together



www.northyorkshireandyork.nhs.uk/stayinghealthy

Public Health Factsheet

Welcome to this edition of Improving Health Together, which focuses on Climate Change and Health.

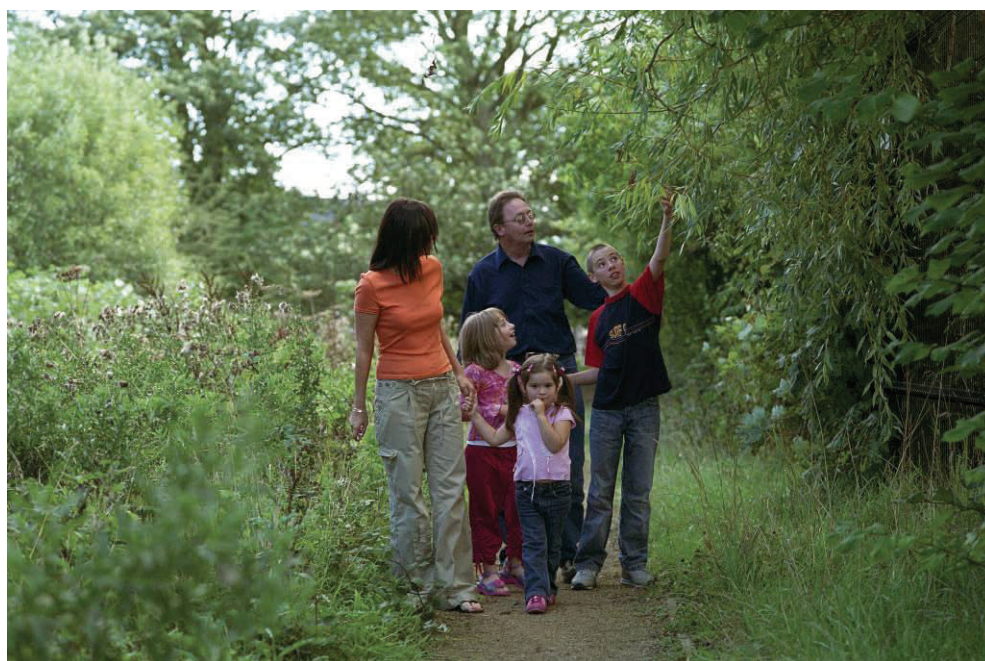
'Climate Change' has been described as one of the greatest challenges facing the world (DECC, 2010)¹.

This factsheet will seek to introduce the key issues and offer practical tips for frontline health professionals. Professor Alan Maryon-Davis, President, Faculty of Public Health has said that 'We are facing a global public health catastrophe. It's up to all of us to use our collective knowledge and skills to lead the change to a healthy, sustainable future.'

The latest Annual Public Health Report of the Director of Public Health (2010)² recommends that frontline health professionals should be familiar with the implications of climate change and try to help reduce their carbon footprint. Don't underestimate your potential role in influencing your patients' behaviours around reducing their carbon footprint!

Climate Change and Health

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The effects of climate change

Health in the UK may be affected by climate change as a result of the global impacts. For example, crop failures may lead to rising prices or possible food shortages and conflict over water, land, and food may lead to mass migration of displaced people.

The direct consequences of climate change for the UK could be an increase in mortality and morbidity from:

- ◆ severe changes in temperature and weather (floods and storms);
- ◆ food poisoning as the instances of food-borne infection rise with warmer temperatures;
- ◆ respiratory problems from the damage to surface ozone during the summer and mould growth in homes;
- ◆ skin cancer and cataracts;
- ◆ insect-borne disease from an increase in flies and fleas;
- ◆ psychological stress.

(Health Effects of Climate Change in the UK⁴)

It has been widely acknowledged that climate change is:

- ◆ Occurring due to human actions.
- ◆ A severe risk to the health and wellbeing of the population and to the security of fundamental resources.
- ◆ Likely to lead to significant environmental and humanitarian crisis.
- ◆ Already occurring across the world.

'An average temperature rise of just two degrees centigrade will have a catastrophic impact on human health. This makes tackling climate change at all levels – individually, organisationally, locally, regionally and globally – a public health imperative, as it will be the most vulnerable societies and the most vulnerable people within societies that will suffer the most'. ([Sustaining a Healthy Future, Faculty of Public Health³](#))

The causes of climate change

Evidence suggests that greenhouse gas emissions (like carbon dioxide and methane) are contributing to climate change. There are four main causes of greenhouse gas emissions:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ◆ Energy—used to heat, light and run homes and workplaces | ◆ Transport—for shopping and leisure, at work and to distribute goods |
| ◆ Food industry—production, transportation and retail | ◆ Production of all other goods and services (excluding food) |

(*Sustaining a Healthy Future³*)

The effects on the environment and on health are likely to impact on disadvantaged communities at a disproportionate level, therefore further contributing to health inequalities.

Measuring our carbon footprint

The term carbon footprint refers to the amount of greenhouse gases produced by our daily living. It is measured in units of tonnes (or kg) of carbon dioxide equivalent. Please visit www.carbonfootprint.com/carbonfootprint.html to estimate your own carbon footprint or that of your organisation.

It is estimated that on average, each individual in the UK produces approximately ten tonnes of carbon emissions annually.

Sustainable development

Most people are probably aware of the term 'sustainable development' but not everyone is clear about that it means. Put simply, the population needs to start living within its means in relation to natural resources. Current lifestyles and ways of living are putting intolerable stress on the environment, thereby endangering the health and wellbeing of future generations.

The role of the NHS

The UK government is committed to reducing carbon dioxide emissions significantly by 2020. As the largest employer in the UK, the NHS has a crucial role to play to help alleviate the effects of climate change and this will primarily be through reducing output of carbon dioxide. The NHS has the potential to set a powerful example to partner organisations and to the public by proactively working to reduce their contribution to climate change. We also have a role in protecting people's health which could be harmed by climate change (and improved by some of the actions which reduce climate change).

Key areas of influence to reduce carbon emissions in your workplace are travel, building, energy use, waste reduction and procurement of goods and services. In addition to this, as frontline health professionals you have a unique opportunity to raise awareness about climate change and its effects. Talk to people about the benefits of a healthy, low carbon lifestyle.

Practical actions to help combat climate change

Adapted from J Griffiths J, A Hill, J Spiby, M Gill, R Stott (2008) Ten Practical actions for doctors to combat climate change. [British Medical Journal](#) 336, p 1507.

- 1 Be aware** about the basic causes of climate change, the health benefits of taking action, and the urgency of doing so.
- 2 Remember to advise patients** that a better diet and more walking and cycling will improve their health and reduce their carbon emissions.
- 3 Try to use less** energy by more insulation in the roof, walls, and floors; turning off appliances and lights; and, where possible, reducing use of goods and services.
- 4 Try to drive the car less;** fly less; walk or cycle more; use public transport; drive an efficient car; share cars; hold meetings by teleconference, videoconference, or webcasting; attend fewer international conferences.

Active travel

Walking or cycling whenever and wherever you can cuts carbon emissions and is also good for your health. Car sharing and cycling to work can help reduce the amount of CO₂ we produce. Simply exchanging your car for a bicycle three times a week can make a significant difference.

Where practical, use public transport

See www.transportdirect.info
www.yorkshiretravel.net
www.northyorkstravel.info

Join (or start) a car sharing scheme

Harrogate: www.harrogatecarshare.com

York: www.carshareyork.com or www.carshare.com

- 5 Consider influencing food menus**— ask for local food, less meat, and less processed food; a low carbon diet is a healthy diet. Drink tap water rather than bottled water.
- 6 Advocate locally** to maximise home insulation and uptake of relevant grants. Signpost patients to the freephone number for the Energy Saving Trust advice centre **0800 512 012**.

[The Hotspots Affordable Warmth Scheme](#) is a practical way for frontline staff to help vulnerable householders to tackle fuel poverty. Making a Hotspots referral, via a simple card, will help tackle fuel poverty and improve the health and wellbeing of the community. It will also help combat climate change as householders can access energy efficiency advice and assessment for home improvements such as loft insulation and cavity walling. For further details please contact the Health Improvement Team: 01904 601595
Rachael.Kumar@nyypct.nhs.uk.



- 7 Advocate to stabilise the population** by promoting literacy and promoting women's access to contraceptives including long acting reversible contraception.
- 8 Be a champion:** put climate change on the agenda of all meetings—clinical teams, committees, and professional networks.
Join up to **British Heart Foundation** 'Health at Work' and get all the resources and tools you need to create your own health club at work to help promote healthy, low carbon lifestyles www.bhf.org.uk/HealthAtWork/default.aspx?page=759. Think Fit physical activity packs and leaflets are also available www.bhf.org.uk/HealthAtWork/getting_active_at_work/resources/order_packs.aspx.
- 9 Gear up your own influence** and that of all health professionals by joining the Climate and Health Council at www.climateandhealth.org/join.
The Climate and Health Council is a network of health professionals informing and advocating on the health benefits of more sustainable lifestyles and the urgency of addressing climate change. www.climateandhealth.org/getinformed

Policy Context/References

1 A Climate Change Act was passed in the UK at the end of 2008 which sets out to reduce carbon emissions to 80% below 1990 levels by 2050, with an interim target of a 34% reduction by 2020. Visit the Department of Energy and Climate Change web pages for further details: www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/legislation/cc_act_08/cc_act_08.aspx

See the Department for Energy and Climate Change website for information on Climate Change Policy www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/what_we_do/change_energy/tackling_clima/tackling_clima.aspx

2 *The Landscape of Health in North Yorkshire and York. The Annual Public Health Report of the Director of Public Health 2010.* [NHS North Yorkshire and York](http://NHSNorthYorkshireandYork).

3 *Sustaining a Healthy Future.* Faculty of Public Health, 2008. www.fph.org.uk/uploads/Sustainable_development_guide.pdf

4 *Health Effects of Climate Change in the UK. An Update of the Department of Health Report 2001/02.* Department of Health and Health Protection Agency, 2007. www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_080702.

Resources

Carbon Trust

The Carbon Trust is a not-for-profit company with the mission to accelerate the move to a low carbon economy.

- ◆ Posters, stickers and thermostats for employee awareness
www.carbontrust.co.uk/cut-carbon-reduce-costs/products-services/energy-management/employee-awareness/posters/pages/posters.aspx
- ◆ Introducing NHS Carbon Management – download
www.carbontrust.co.uk/publications/pages/publicationdetail.aspx?id=CTX606
- ◆ Creating an awareness campaign pack - download
www.carbontrust.co.uk/publications/pages/publicationdetail.aspx?id=CTG001



10:10

10:10 is a movement of people, schools, businesses and organisations cutting their carbon by 10% in a year.

www.1010global.org/uk/resources

Envirowise

Resource efficiency poster

<http://envirowise.wrap.org.uk/uk/Our-Services/Publications/EN501D-Resource-efficiency-poster.html>

Websites

Climate Change

Department of Energy and Climate Change

www.decc.gov.uk/



Policy lead in tackling the challenges of climate change and how we source, manage and use our energy.

Directgov

www.direct.gov.uk/



The government website offers simple and clear information and awareness around a number of issues including Climate Change

Act on CO₂

<http://actonco2.direct.gov.uk/>

Cross-Government initiative working with businesses and individuals to reduce CO₂ emissions. Involves the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC), the Department for Transport (DfT) and Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).



Energy Saving Tips

Energy saving trust

The Energy Saving Trust offers impartial advice to help people save energy and reduce their carbon emissions by helping them find the best ways to save energy, conserve water and reduce waste.

www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/



Age UK

Age UK offer a number of practical energy saving tips:

www.ageuk.org.uk/



Active travel – Sustrans

Sustrans' Active Travel programme works with communities and partner organisations, to enable more people to walk and cycle.

www.sustrans.org.uk/



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