

Climate Change and Health

Communication guide



Research results for action



Prairie
Climate Centre

BACKGROUND

At a time of intersecting public health crises of COVID-19 and climate change, understanding public perceptions of the health risks of climate change is critical to inform risk communication and support the adoption of adaptive behaviours. In Canada, very few studies have explored public understandings and perceptions of climate impacts on health.

A Canadian Survey

Given the urgency of communicating and acting on climate change combined with the evolving discourse regarding public health in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a need to understand Canadians' perceptions of the health risks of climate change.

3014 Canadians responded in this nationally-representative survey done in December of 2020. The 116-question survey measured prior consideration of the link between **climate change and health**, affective assessment of climate health impacts, unprompted knowledge of climate health impacts, and concern about a range of climate-related impacts.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

- (1) To determine perceptions of the link between climate change and health;
- (2) To evaluate Canadians' level of concern around specific health impacts of climate change; and
- (3) To explore how climate and health risk perceptions can inform public engagement and communications.

FINDINGS

CONCERN

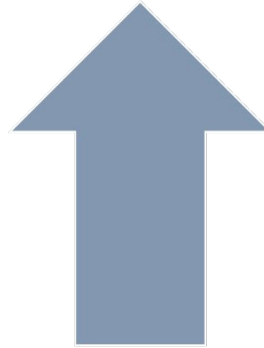
To contextualize the concerns Canadians have about the health impacts of climate change, we asked survey respondents **to rate their level of concern about climate change impacts** in four categories: health impacts, biophysical impacts, economic impacts and impacts on national security



- *Health impacts of climate change are as concerning as biophysical and economic impacts*
 - *People with more education and towards the 'left' of the political spectrum were more concerned about all impacts*
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HOW MUCH HAD YOU THOUGHT ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE AND HEALTH

Q: Before taking this survey, how much had you thought about how climate change might affect people's health?



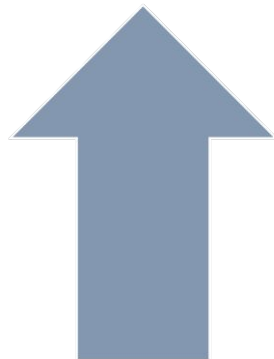
Highest Consideration

- Increased level of education
- “Left” political leaning

Prior consideration of the link between climate change and health is higher among people with more education and who are politically left-leaning

PERCEIVED IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON HEALTH

Q: How would you rate the impact of climate change on people's health?



Highest Perception of Impact

- Women
- "Left" leaning
- Higher education levels

*Most Canadians perceive climate change as bad for
people's health*

HEALTH IMPACTS

To assess health impacts of highest concern to Canadians, we asked respondents their levels of concern for 15 different health impacts of climate change. These impacts fell into five categories: water and food borne diseases, air quality, mental health, temperature-impacts and infectious diseases.



- *Water- and food-related impacts are of high concern, among other climate health impacts*
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HEALTH IMPACTS

In order to understand how well Canadians can identify health-related impacts of climate change, they were asked the open-ended question:

Q: *“In what ways, if any, do you think climate change will affect the health of Canadians?”*

**More than half of Canadians
can name one or more health
impact of climate change**

IMPLICATIONS FOR HEALTH AND CLIMATE COMMUNICATION

Implications for health and climate communications

Key findings of public perceptions

- Most Canadians perceive climate change as harmful to human health

Implications for health and climate communications

- Public health framing in climate communications may be effective to some extent with Canadians
- The majority of people are likely open to information about the health risks of climate change, given that they accept that it is harmful.

Implications for health and climate communications

Key findings of public perceptions

- People towards the left on the political spectrum and those with more education are more concerned about climate health impacts than the rest of the Canadian population.

Implications for health and climate communications

- Health framing in climate communications is likely to be more successful in reaching those already worried about climate change

Implications for health and climate communications

Key findings of public perceptions

- Canadians who are more concerned about climate change are also more concerned about the health impacts of climate change.

Implications for health and climate communications

- To increase awareness and concern on climate health impacts, a communicator must be aware of the specific audiences that may (or may not) agree with the message.

Implications for health and climate communications

Key findings of public perceptions

- Canadians have higher concern for future generations, food and water security, and respiratory impacts from air quality, and lower concern for infectious diseases, mental health and heat stroke impacts.

Implications for health and climate communications

- Communicators using public health framings in climate change communications may choose to focus on specific health impacts of high or low concern, depending on their goals.
- Climate communicators hoping to reach the largest audiences with messages that mean most to Canadians, might use the areas of highest concern in their messaging.

Other health and climate change resources

Visit our Health topic on the Climate Atlas of Canada for more information and resources on how climate change impacts our health

Climate Change and Health

One of the climate change threats we too seldom talk about is its growing impact on our health. But the evidence shows that people are going to lose years from their life from climate change-related risks, including extreme heat, wildfire smoke, smog, and new diseases.

The good news is that taking action to stop climate change is also good for our health. Renewable energy, greening our cities, and active transportation have positive health benefits *and* reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

[Learn more >](#)

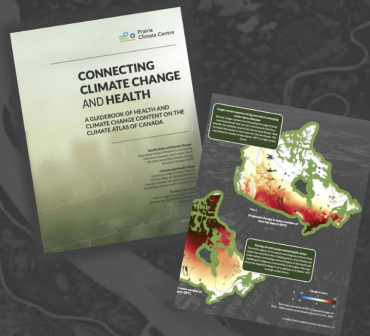
SPECIAL REPORT ON Connecting Climate Change and Health

A guidebook of health and climate change content on the Atlas of Canada

We often think about climate change as something abstract or remote. But in fact the changing climate is having effects right here and now, impacting the everyday lives and health of Canadians. By taking action on climate change, we can build healthier and more resilient communities.

This guidebook explores the many ways that climate change is affecting the health of Canadians - from heat illnesses to mental health issues - drawing together the range of articles, videos, and maps found in the Climate Atlas health topic.

[Download the report](#) (PDF, 14.4MB)



<https://climateatlas.ca/topic/health>

More information

Casson, N., Cameron, L., Mauro, I., Friesen-Hughes, K., Rocque, R. Perceptions of the health impacts of climate change among Canadians. *BMC Public Health* 23, 212 (2023).

<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-023-15105-z>