

Climate Change and Children's Health

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"While no single step can reverse the effects of climate change, we have a moral obligation to future generations to leave them a planet that is not polluted and damaged. Through steady, responsible action to cut carbon pollution, we can protect our children's health and begin to slow the effects of climate change so that we leave behind a cleaner, more stable environment."

-President Obama's Climate Action Plan

"In our ignorance and our greed, we have damaged the world and silenced many of the voices of the choir of Creation. Now we must fix it. There is no one else to repair it but us."

-Rabbi Lawrence Troster, COEJL.org website

It's easy to see how environmental health concerns and our interest in living ecologically responsible lives intersect when we consider global warming and its impact on our planet and its inhabitants. The health and wellbeing of populations, including particularly children and those with lower incomes, are thought to be at the greatest risk.

Children are often most affected by environmental change and contamination, due to their rapidly growing bodies, long life expectancy, and their ever-maturing immune systems. In addition, children eat more food per pound of body weight than adults, and may therefore be more susceptible to the ill effects of contaminants and toxins. Low-income populations often do not possess the resources to mitigate the ill effects of heat and environmental contamination.

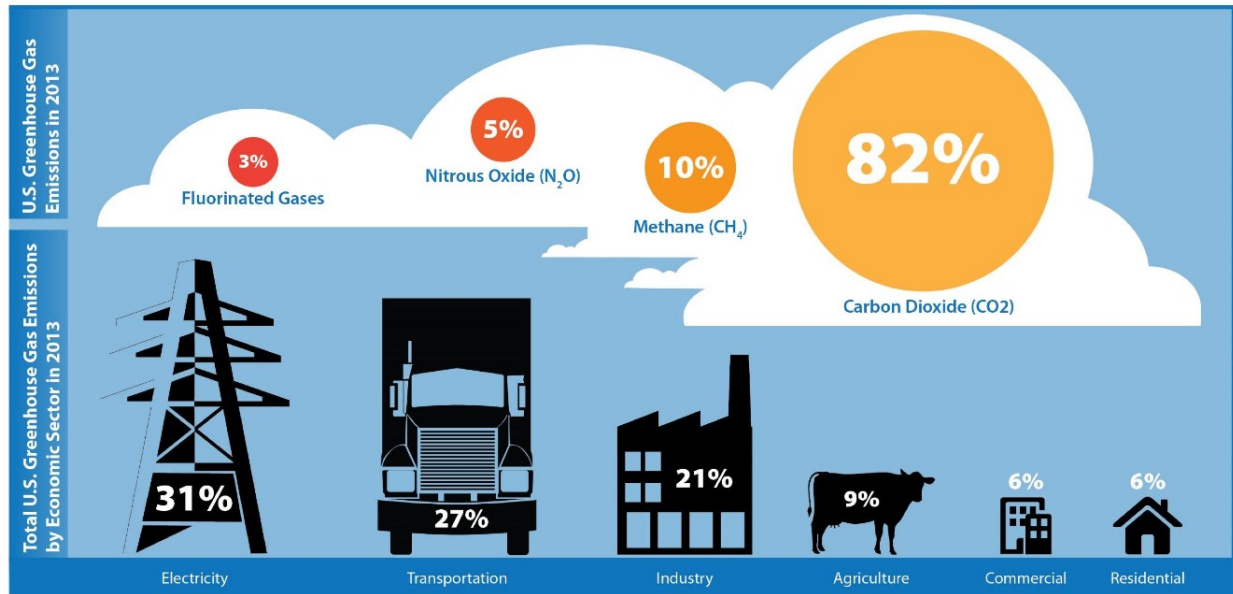
On May 11th, a conference entitled *The Social and Economic Costs of Climate Change on Children's Health: What Do We Know and What Can We Do?* was hosted by The Children's Environmental Health Network (CEHN), the Center for Environmental Policy at American University's School of Public Affairs, and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. The full report, much of which can be readily appreciated by non-scientists, can be accessed at:

http://www.cehn.org/files/Fullwriteup_May11climatechange_final.pdf

The presenters at the conference used asthma as a model to illustrate what happens when temperatures rise. As temperature extremes become more frequent and ozone and carbon dioxide levels rise, ragweed levels will also rise. And all of these things together lead directly to a serious increase in childhood asthma, a terrible disease that we should be working to eliminate and not complacently allowing to become more common and to affect more and more children. There will be more hospitalizations, more time lost from school and work, and a greater impact on the families of these children. There is also a correlation between heat-induced physical stress and a tendency to give birth to low-birth-weight babies. Air conditioning is a luxury not shared by the vast majority of the world's inhabitants.

CARBON POLLUTION IS THE BIGGEST DRIVER OF CLIMATE CHANGE

U.S. GREENHOUSE GAS POLLUTION INCLUDES:



So what can we do? The EPA has outlined its plans to address this issue and help mitigate the problem. We can

- Reduce carbon pollution from the power sector through the Clean Power Plan.
- Reduce hydrofluorocarbon emissions.
- Set more stringent greenhouse gas standards for heavy-duty vehicles.
- Reduce methane emissions, and
- Enhance climate adaptation capabilities.

As individuals, we can drive less, eat less meat (less energy involved in crop production, and less methane produced), buy more efficient appliances and vehicles, walk more, ride a bicycle, and waste less electricity. Support initiatives to make each of these plausible and possible for every citizen to undertake as his or her personal contribution to the solution of a problem we all share.

If you would like to read more about the effect of climate change on children's health, including some very interesting videos, look here:

<http://www.niehs.nih.gov/news/video/scivid/children/index.cfm>

Individuals can also support government efforts to reduce the use of fossil fuels and promote renewable energy sources.