

Successfully Preparing for Climate Change in New York State

Environmental health professionals are working across sectors to ensure healthy communities for all. While understanding the decisions made upstream impact communities downstream, partnerships are key to lessening or improving the negative health impacts of our environments. Through these partnerships, environmental health professionals are able to integrate health and equity considerations in the planning and decision-making process to achieve healthier environments for all.



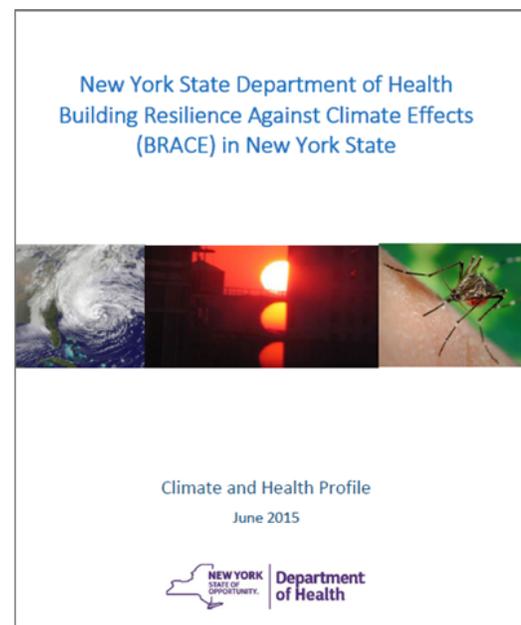
From superstorms to heatwaves, New Yorkers are exposed to many negative health impacts of climate change. The New York State Department of Health works to engage and educate all New Yorkers to enhance understanding of the public health impacts of climate change and empower them to take actions to reduce or eliminate those health consequences. New York State has experienced the effects of climate change in several ways including extreme weather events like Superstorm Sandy. Through partnerships, the NYSDOH has found great success in addressing the health effects of climate change. For example, with support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, NYSDOH completed an extensive study to assess the impacts of Sandy on the public health infrastructure in the state. Some of these findings are being published in *Disaster Medicine and Public Health Preparedness*. Based on the strengths and challenges reported by staff, recommendations are being disseminated for public health agency implementation including more sharing of resources, increased communication in advance of emergency events and hands-on exercises in staff training for emergency responses. The study documented lessons learned from Sandy, demonstrating that NYS is better prepared to respond to future disasters caused by climate change through improvements like an emergency patient tracking system. NYSDOH was also awarded a Climate-Ready States and Cities Initiative (CRSCI) grant from the CDC to build capacity and develop a plan for reducing the human health impacts of climate change. The NYSDOH has been successful with implementing the CDC's Building Resistance Against Climate Effects (BRACE) framework by developing the NYS Climate and Health Profile Report, collaborating with the Public Health Tracking Program, and promoting Climate Smart Communities.



Here are some highlights from the successful collaborations to address climate change in New York:

NYS Climate and Health Profile Report

The changing climate in NYS has been connected to injury, illness, and death. To assess vulnerabilities to climate change and potential health impacts in New York State, NYSDOH developed a NYS Climate and Health Profile Report that presents a snapshot of the climate in NYS, and changes over time, projections about future climate trends, and the impacts that those climate changes may have on health. The profile report highlights that NYS is becoming warmer and wetter. Additionally, some populations are more at risk including the elderly, children, those with low socioeconomic status, tribal populations, socially isolated, homeless, those with chronic diseases and mental illness, living in areas that flood, people who use private wells, outdoor workers, and migrant farmworkers. Those at higher risk may experience a greater severity of impact, be less able to engage in adaptive behaviors to minimize exposures, and have reduced ability to recover from climate related events. Challenges in developing this comprehensive report included limitations in projecting climate change due to gaps in understanding some physical processes. As efforts continue to better characterize climate indicators, the report may be revised. The strength of the report is that it provides a framework for determining where action is needed and a guide for future direction. The report is available to stakeholders online and has been adapted into a Climate and Health 101 online course to increase community awareness about the connection between climate change and public health impacts.



Learn more: www.health.ny.gov/environmental/weather/docs/climatehealthprofile6-2015.pdf

You can register for Climate and Health 101 at www.NYLearnsPH.com. Go to course catalog and search for BRACE-Climate101 and click enroll.

Collaborating with Public Health Tracking

Warmer weather is the hallmark of climate change in NYS. Armed with the knowledge that air conditioning can be an effective intervention to protect against heat related illness, cooling centers have been established across NYS. Concerned with increasing risk of heat related illness, the Environmental Public Health Tracking program has developed a map which can be used to view county-specific cooling center locations. Through collaboration between New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, the EPHT program and the CRSCI, the



locations of cooling centers are now available to support planning for high temperature days. Combined with available information on vulnerable populations, local communities can determine what steps are needed to make cooling centers more accessible for those in need. For example, elderly adults have been identified as a vulnerable population and, moving forward, the EPHT tool can be utilized to ensure accessibility for this population including more locations along public transit routes. One challenge was making this online information accessible for all. Therefore, this information provides public health professionals with a tool to inform planning for extreme heat events to communicate to those who need it.

Learn more: www.health.ny.gov/environmental/weather/cooling/index.htm

“Moving climate from an environmental issue to a public health issue I think is absolutely key...”

Promoting Climate Smart Communities

Many communities across NYS recognized the urgency of climate change in their backyards and expressed interest in planning for climate-related health impacts. Through the Climate Smart Communities (CSC) program local governments receive guidance on how to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, save taxpayer dollars and advance community health and safety goals as well as economic vitality, energy independence and quality of life. The CSC program seeks to advance community health through mitigating vulnerabilities by encouraging the creation or updating of hazard-mitigation plans and extreme heat plans. One challenge in implementing the program was achieving widespread reach – as NYS has 62 counties, 932 towns and 62 cities. Partnership was the key to expanding the reach. The NYSDOH is one of the six NYS agencies sponsoring this initiative and has partnered with the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Office of Climate Change to support local jurisdictions becoming certified “Climate Smart Communities.” NYSDOH has integrated the CSC into the CRSCI activities and provides input on the standards detailed in the CSC Certification Manual. NYSDOH CRSCI has been focusing on supporting local health departments plan for adaptation and unavoidable impacts of climate change. These planning activities will later be eligible to fulfill requirements of the CSC certification program. Ultimately, communities receive guidance which will protect the health of their people as well as positive recognition for their efforts to combat climate change. Currently Kingston is drafting plans to promote walking and bicycle use, which will improve health while reducing greenhouse gas emissions.



Learn more: www.dec.ny.gov/energy/50845.html

Future Direction

The collaborations and partnerships fostered by NYSDOH CRSCI demonstrate the infrastructure needed to create an integrative approach to combating the health impacts of climate change. NYSDOH plans to implement interventions that will assist local health departments in prioritizing climate change and supporting their community mitigation efforts.