

# Urgent need to address long-term health effects of extreme weather

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Extreme weather. Credit: Taylor & Francis

As climate change makes extreme weather events more frequent and severe, understanding how they affect human health in the long-term is essential to developing more effective approaches for planning and

response, says research paper published in the *Journal of the Air & Waste Management Association*.

In recent decades, there has been a large increase in the frequency and severity of many extreme weather climate-related events across the globe associated with warming temperatures, including recurrent monsoons and droughts in India, the devastating hurricane in Puerto Rico and serious flooding in Houston to name just a few.

When preparing a disaster response, understanding the many, complex ways in which [extreme events](#) affect [human health](#) are essential, says Dr. Jesse Bell of North Carolina Institute of Climate Studies and colleagues. Events, such as heatwaves, flooding, and wildfires, can result in immediate injuries and loss of life, but often overlooked are the other indirect or delayed health effects.

More work needs to be done to examine the influence of extreme events on long-term health outcomes. For example, while the chronic psychological effects of catastrophic events are generally well-documented, there is less systematic evidence of the mental health impacts of less severe but more frequent extreme events.

Planning based on historical examples alone may fail to provide a complete picture of potential health threats, the authors warn. As the climate changes, historical norms alone are no longer sufficient for understanding the relationship between [extreme weather events](#) and public health outcomes.

Coordinated institutional, government and private sector programs are needed to help to help recovery from the event and rebuild infrastructure, sustain jobs and augment childhood psychological support services.

Healthcare facilities should investigate vulnerabilities in local infrastructure to ensure they can withstand the disruptions that extreme events cause, such as overcrowding, loss of power and reduction of staff. Many hospitals are inconveniently located, for example near coastal areas prone to tropical storms and hurricanes, so proper preparedness is needed to ensure such facilities maintain operation when the need is greatest.

"Some of the associations between extreme events and [health](#) are already understood, but many opportunities exist for exploring additional linkages and pathways," the authors conclude. "Incorporating such information into planning efforts would improve preparedness and reduce impacts."

**More information:** *Journal of the Air & Waste Management Association*, [DOI: 10.1080/10962247.2017.1401017](https://doi.org/10.1080/10962247.2017.1401017)

Provided by Taylor & Francis

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