



CLIMATE CHANGE AND WOMEN'S HEALTH

Position Statement

Conclusive evidence has demonstrated that that climate change is having a dramatic impact on the lives of people around the world. Representing physicians dedicated to the whole well-being of women – including their safety, security, and access to quality care – the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recognizes that climate change is an urgent women's health concern as well as a major public health challenge. We call on our national and international leaders to act to curb greenhouse gas emissions and limit further climate destabilization.

Without question, climate change [has a disproportionate effect on global women's health](#)ⁱ, as it broadens existing gender-based health disparities. The effects of climate change – such as food and water insecurity, civil conflicts, extreme weather events, spread of disease, and more – put women in affected regions at elevated risk of disease, malnutrition, sexual violence, poor mental health, lack of reproductive control, negative obstetric outcomes, and death. This also has an impact on future generations, with the rate of low-birth weight infants increasing in regions impacted by the effects of climate change, and with the erosion of the health care infrastructure needed to support healthy women and healthy families.

The impact of environmental toxins in the preconception and prenatal period [can have a profound and lasting impact](#)ⁱⁱ on obstetrical outcomes, and these can have negative consequences that last throughout a lifetime. Evidence suggests that climate change can exacerbate the already significant risks to fetal health and the health of future generations.

ACOG also emphasizes that proactive steps to protect and to develop women's health care access can aid significantly in a region's recovery. For example, we know that [reliable access to reproductive health services](#)ⁱⁱⁱ enhances the ability of women to contribute to social and economic development.

Moreover, as the effects of climate change continue to threaten the well-being of women across the globe, we ask that government and public health agencies take steps to ensure the protection of women's health services and human rights.

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ⁱ World Health Organization. Gender, climate change and health. Geneva: WHO; 2014. Available at: <http://www.who.int/globalchange/GenderClimateChangeHealthfinal.pdf>. Retrieved November 23, 2015.

ⁱⁱ Exposure to toxic environmental agents. Committee Opinion No. 575. American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists. *Obstet Gynecol* 2013;122:931-5.

ⁱⁱⁱ Sonfield A, Hasstedt K, Kavanaugh ML, Anderson R. The social and economic benefits of women's ability to determine whether and when to have children. New York: Guttmacher Institute; 2013. Available at: <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/social-economic-benefits.pdf>. Retrieved January 12, 2016.