

# What New Jersey Nurses Need to Know About Climate Change

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The American Nurses Association (ANA) states that climate change is an urgent public health issue that requires immediate action to mitigate its impact on the health and well-being of the population (ANA position statement [2023, September 8]) retrieved on March 20, 2025 <https://www.nursingworld.org/practice-policy/nursing-excellence/official-position-statements/id/climate-change/>. Due to the health consequences arising from climate change, nurses will inevitably interact with patients who are affected by climate related illness in their careers. Climate change is a global challenge, but we should focus on local and hyper-local impacts of climate change in our own communities and workplaces to determine where and how we can make a difference.

Health care organizations contribute significantly to greenhouse gas emissions, waste production, and climate change. It is estimated that the health-care industry contributes 8.5% of greenhouse gas emissions (World Economic Forum, 2024). Greenhouse gas emissions are the leading cause of increasing temperatures, changing weather patterns, increased wildfires, rising sea levels, and increased air pollution we are seeing today (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], n.d.). These climate effects lead to complex challenges and complicated health consequences for our patients. Some of the most prominent health issues in New Jersey related to climate change are increasing exacerbations of respiratory conditions, increasing aeroallergens, water and food supply disruptions, heat related illness, mental health stressors like anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and in-

creasing vector-borne diseases such as Lyme disease and West Nile virus.

New Jersey residents who suffer the effects of extreme weather disaster may also face displacement, homelessness, loss of income, and loss of access to healthcare. The effects of climate change are pervasive and specific to local geographic region and community characteristics which is why there cannot be a one-size-fits-all intervention or goal for health improvement. Nurses need to consider vulnerable populations such as infants, children, pregnant females, older adults, people with pre-existing conditions, and people living in environmental justice areas because they are at higher risk for health problems related to climate change (NJ.gov, 2025) retrieved March 20, 2025 <https://www.nj.gov/health/ceohs/public-health-tracking/climate-change/>

How can nurses provide care in a way that is not damaging to the earth? Have you thought about how to incorporate more sustainable health care practices in your workplace? Where does one start?

Nurses at every level — clinicians, educators, and students should become engaged in planetary health by educating themselves about the topic of climate change. There is evolving knowledge about the health effects of climate change on patients, and nurses need to anticipate increased patient health problems related to the effects of climate change.

Schools that prepare students to become nurses must integrate climate change topics into their curricula if not doing so already. Public health and nursing leaders can increase efforts to make practice changes at the local, state, and

national level. Nurses can become more involved in climate change policy and be advocates for their patients. As always, nurses adapt and strongly influence nursing practice innovation by taking the lead in spreading the word about what works, organizing, and making valuable changes in their places of employment. ■