

Although one may dispute that the rise of diseases(e.g. Covid) and obesity are major health threats, there is no doubt that climate change is still the single biggest health threat to humanity due to its nature exacerbating various existing health risks instead of posing as one singular risk.

Multiple physical threats come with climate change. - notably the increase of extreme weather events, such as heatwaves - which have increased from two to six per year in the US¹. Heatwaves disrupt crop growth in various countries, threatening food security and increasing the risk of famine which thus leads to mass migration thus, leading to a rapid increase in population density in certain places, exacerbating the formation of slums. Heatwaves also increase the risk of heatstroke and skin cancer, thus leading to long-term adverse effects on most of the population².

Secondly, increased atmospheric temperatures will lead to the melting the polar ice caps - which are declining by 13% yearly³. This increases the sea level, increasing the risk of floods and reducing arable lands on the coast, thus leading to mass migration. In addition, infrastructure, such as nuclear power plants, could be destroyed, leading to several uninhabitable places and exacerbating the spread of various forms of cancer via a radioactive medium, thus decreasing life expectancy.

Moreover, increased temperatures enable more countries to develop a tropical climate that provides sufficient conditions for spreading diseases like malaria. Temperatures have been rising by 0.18 °C per year since 1980⁴, provoking an increase in disease outbreaks. This disease spread may attack less developed tropical countries(where protection against infections is minimal) hence maximising the health threat that this poses.

It is also imperative to acknowledge the mental health effects perpetrated by climate change; for instance, the mass migration from places with an emotional attachment to a new home can cause depression - especially in those with less financially stable backgrounds⁵. This is known as solastalgia and is pivotal to our future, as worse mental health will result in a less efficient workforce and less drive to solve problems.

It is also important to note that it is the most significant health risk due to two factors. One factor is that the world relies heavily on energy fuelled by non-renewable resources. Another factor is that a large proportion of the world consumes meat-based products, which increases greenhouse gas production, such as methane from cattle ranching⁶.

¹ [https://www.epa.gov/climate-indicators/climate-change-indicators-heat-waves#:~:text=Data%20%7C%20Technical%20Documentation-,Key%20Points,2020s%20\(see%20Figure%201\).](https://www.epa.gov/climate-indicators/climate-change-indicators-heat-waves#:~:text=Data%20%7C%20Technical%20Documentation-,Key%20Points,2020s%20(see%20Figure%201).)

² <https://citymed.co.za/climate-change-heatwaves-and-the-incidence-of-skin-cancer/>

³ <https://www.worldwildlife.org/pages/six-ways-loss-of-arctic-ice-impacts-everyone#:~:text=Polar%20ice%20caps%20are%20melting,declined%20by%20a%20stunning%2095%25.>

⁴ <https://www.climate.gov/news-features/understanding-climate/climate-change-global-temperature>

⁵ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00038-009-0112-0>

⁶ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0022030212002913>