



City of Big Lake Environmental Education Newsletter

World Health Day

People often think of the environment and health as two separate ideas, but the two concepts are inherently linked. The environment has a huge effect on your health, and that of your friends, family, and children.

In 2015, the United Nations created the Sustainable Development Goals. Goal #3 is "Good Health and Well-Being." For the United Nations that means "ensuring healthy lives and promoting the well-being for all ages is essential to sustainable development. Significant strides have been made in increasing life expectancy and reducing some of the common killers associated with child and maternal mortality. Major progress has been made on increasing access to clean water and sanitation, reducing malaria, tuberculosis, polio and the spread of HIV/AIDS. However, many more efforts are needed to fully eradicate a wide range of diseases and address many different persistent and emerging health issues."



Good health and well-being is vitally important to making any sustainable change. In past newsletters, we have focused primarily on environmental sustainability, but there are two other aspects of sustainability as well: equity and economic. World Health Day, and Goal #3, includes all aspects of sustainability: environmental, equity, and economic.

However, this newsletter is about environmental education, therefore we will focus on the connections between environmental and human health.

According to the World Health Organization, in 2012, 1.7 million deaths in children under 5 were attributed to the environment. More specifically, children were dying of respiratory infections (570,000), diarrhea (361,000), and malaria (200,000). Now many of these diseases, like malaria, are not a pressing issue in our temperate Minnesota climate. But no matter where children live, they are particularly vulnerable to some environmental risks such as air pollution, inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene, hazardous chemicals and wastes, radiation, and emerging threats such as climate change and e-waste. Reducing these risks could prevent 1 in 4 deaths in children.

Because the environment affects the health of everyone, no matter where they live, the MN Department of Health is calling environmental change "the greatest public health challenge of the 21st century because it threatens the very basic needs that life depends on: air, water, food, shelter, and security." They are particularly concerned about a few phenomena:

- Extreme Heat
 - Extreme heat can bring on a multitude of health issues like hyperventilation, heat rash, heat cramps, heat exhaustion, swelling, fainting, and heat stroke. Some of these issues can eventually lead to death.

- People who are particularly vulnerable to these risks are elderly persons, children, people with pre-existing conditions like heart disease, people taking certain medications, athletes, and outdoor workers
- A lack of air conditioning at home, prolonged sun exposure, drinking alcohol, and exercising outside of warm days increases the health risks.
- Environmental changes have health officials worried about extreme heat because our relief from such heat events comes from overnight lows, and overnight temperatures have been steadily increasing.
- Flooding and Drought
 - Flooding can cause food and water borne illnesses and increased allergies due to mold.
 - Drought is responsible for causing food insecurity, which is a public health concern.
 - With increased precipitation projected for Minnesota, our crops will be affected, as will those who suffer from allergies.
- Vector-borne Diseases
 - Vector-borne diseases are human illnesses caused by parasites. With warming temperatures, this puts Minnesotans at increased risk for Lyme disease and West Nile Virus.
- Air Pollution
 - Environmental change is projected to bring more air stagnation to Minnesota as well as more air pollutants with it, which means an increased risk for heart disease, cancer, and respiratory diseases
 - Air pollution can also be the cause of chest pain, shortness of breath, wheezing, coughing, and fatigue
 - People who are particularly vulnerable to these risks are elderly persons, children, people with pre-existing conditions like heart disease, people taking certain medications, athletes, and outdoor workers



The best way to prevent these concerns from becoming worse in the coming years is to continue to work toward environmental conservation, preservation, and protection. The world's health depends on it, as does your own!

Information came from the World Health Organization, UN Sustainable Development Goals, MN Department of Health, and the National Weather Service – National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration