

HEALTH IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE: Fires



HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES

Fires can result in physical, financial, and mental health impacts from displacement, damaged homes, and loss of housing and possessions. Loss of housing can create ongoing stresses, especially if there is a lack of alternative suitable accommodation for whānau and pets.

TRANSPORT

Fires can impact and reduce access to emergency and healthcare services, as well as evacuation efforts. Additionally, smoke from fires can reduce visibility, make travel difficult and increase risk of accidents.

WATER

Fires can result in water contamination from ash and fire debris, contaminating water supplies and nearby freshwater areas. Impacted water supplies can result in increased gastroenteritis (stomach bugs) and infectious diseases. This contamination can impact mahinga kai and awa tupuna as well as recreational activities.

ENERGY

Fires can damage power lines and energy infrastructure impacting electricity supply to community households, healthcare facilities, and other essential services. Damaged electricity lines can also cause electrical burns and injuries.

LOCAL FOOD SYSTEMS

Crops and livestock could be impacted by wildfires, resulting in increased food costs and food insecurity. Fires can also significantly affect financial security and mental health of agricultural workers and farmers.

LANDFILLS AND POLLUTIONS

Fires in landfills can emit toxic smoke and gases, depending on the materials contained within the landfill. Toxic smoke and gases can exacerbate existing health conditions and cause respiratory and breathing issues.

BIODIVERSITY

Biodiversity loss due to drought/increased temperatures/fires is impactful to the health and wellbeing of everyone. A particular concern for Māori is damage or loss of indigenous ecosystems, which can impact spiritual and mental wellbeing, as well as cultural identity. Natural environments are significant sources of wellbeing to the community, and their loss can have huge impacts.

DIRECT IMPACTS

Fires can cause acute burns, injury and mortality, and result in an increase in hospitalisation. The smoke and particles in the air from fires can impact the air quality surrounding the fire, causing and exacerbating respiratory issues, including asthma, as well as cardiovascular issues.