

Children's Environmental Health in California

Children's healthy development and ability to thrive depends on many factors, including their access to health care, emotional support and secure relationships, education, and nutrition. There is widespread concern about the fact that children's natural- and built-environments can influence health outcomes throughout the lifespan. Frequent exposure to contaminants like heavy metals, toxic chemicals, and ambient air pollutants as well as food insecurity, heat stress, and noise pollution can lead to chronic disease and irreversible poor health outcomes. Climate change is exacerbating the effects of toxins, and kids, especially kids of color, are disproportionately at risk.

Air pollution, for example, inhibits [cognitive development](#) and can cause [chronic absenteeism](#), while [lead poisoning](#) is associated with learning difficulties, impaired hearing, reduced attention span, delayed puberty, cancer and higher levels of criminal activity in adult life. Children and adolescents spend [twice as much time outdoors](#) and engaged in vigorous activity as adults, while also inhaling more pollution per pound of body weight than adults, making them especially vulnerable to environmental health hazards. Many schools, daycare centers, and public spaces are located near or directly adjacent to farms, increasing the potential for children's exposure to neurotoxins in pesticides.

There is also [evidence](#) that maternal stress, social inequality, and the psychosocial stressors of living in poverty amplify the health effects of environmental pollutants on both infants and mothers. Children of color are [more likely](#) to live in unsafe housing with possible lead exposure, hotter temperatures, less access to affordable, nutritious food, and worse air quality.

Providers, government agencies and public health departments, legislators, and organizations must work to reduce disparities and advocate for policies that increase funding for regulation around children's environmental exposures, invest in climate education and literacy, and safeguard the health of California's kids. Every child deserves access to clean air and water, healthy food, and a safe environment in which to grow and learn.

Children's Environmental Health Disparities in California At-a-Glance

- [Approximately 1 in 4 child care centers in California have drinking water with lead above safe levels](#), some as high as 2200 times the legal limit; there is [no safe amount of lead exposure](#) for children.
- [African American, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Latino/a children have the highest asthma diagnosis rates in California because of environmental racism](#) that concentrates highways, industrial plants, toxic chemicals, neglected soil, corroded plumbing, and pesticide use in communities of color.
- As the environment warms, [for every 10° Fahrenheit increase in weekly average temperature in California, there is an 11.6% increase in preterm delivery](#), which increases the risk of respiratory illnesses, lower cognitive abilities, and behavioral problems.
- [Over one-third of schools in California had pesticides linked to public health concerns applied within a quarter mile of where kids learn and play](#); however Latino schoolchildren are 91% more likely than white students to be exposed to the highest levels of hazardous pesticides.
- In 2019, [14% of California children](#) ages 0-17 (over 1.2 million) lived in food-insecure households. [Black Californians are more than twice as likely to experience food insecurity](#) than white Californians.

Learn More:

Research:

- [American Academy of Pediatrics- Environmental Health](#)
- [California Children's Environmental Health Factsheet](#) from the Children's Environmental Health Network (CEHN)
- [Lets Get Healthy California](#)

Data and Recent Reports:

- [CalEnviroScreen 4.0](#)
- [Tracking California](#)
- [Place Matters: The Environment We Create Shapes the Foundations of Healthy Development](#)
- [Climate Change Impacts Across California: Health](#)

California Health and Environmental Agencies:

- [California Children's Environmental Health Center](#)
- [California Air Resources Board \(CARB\)](#)
- [California Department of Conservation](#)
- [California Department of Health Services \(DHCS\)](#)
- [California Department of Public Health \(CDPH\)](#)
- [California Department of Toxic Substances Control](#)
- [California Department of Water Resources](#)
- [California Environmental Protection Agency \(CalEPA\)](#)
- [California Health & Human Services Agency \(CalHHS\)](#)
- [California Natural Resources Agency](#)
- [California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment](#)
- [Department of Pesticide Regulation \(DPR\)](#)
- [State Water Resources Control Board](#)

HR 123 (Reyes) recognizes October as Children's Environmental Health Month, and in order to raise policymaker awareness of the environmental issues threatening children's health in California, this document was prepared as part of a legislative briefing co-sponsored by: Children Now; Environmental Working Group; Pesticide Action Network of North America; Families Advocating for Pesticide and Toxic Chemicals Safety; Undaunted K12; Regional Asthma Management & Prevention; American Academy of Pediatrics\California; American Nurses Association, California; Breast Cancer Over Time; Brighter Beginnings; California Nurses for Environmental Health & Justice; California School-Based Health Alliance; Center for Environmental Health; Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment; Central California Environmental Justice Network; Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy; Children's Specialty Care Coalition; Friends Committee on Legislation in California; Los Angeles Trust for Children's Health; Monterey Bay Central Labor Council; Pesticide Action Network; Physicians for Social Responsibility Los Angeles; Regional Asthma Management & Prevention; Sierra Club, California; and Western Center on Law & Poverty; Re:wild Your Campus; Sonoma County Climate Activist Network (SoCoCAN!)

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