

NEW ZEALAND

LANCET COUNTDOWN ON HEALTH AND CLIMATE CHANGE DATA SHEET 2025

Health and climate change in New Zealand

The Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change tracks the evolving relationship between climate and health through 50+ peer-reviewed indicators. Since 2016, it has provided peer-reviewed annual assessments, published in *The Lancet*. The 2025 report reveals the grave health toll of climate change inaction: fossil fuel dependence, rising emissions, and delayed adaptation are costing millions of lives. Recent climate policy rollbacks further threaten our ability to respond to the accelerating crisis, undermining progress towards a healthy future.

This document highlights key country-level findings for New Zealand from the 2025 Lancet Countdown report, showing that:



Storms and floods: Frequent and intense storms and floods in New Zealand are threatening food and water security, damaging sanitation infrastructure, and increasing the risk of malnutrition and infectious disease outbreaks.



Heat: In New Zealand, populations are increasingly exposed to extreme heat, contributing to rising cases of heat-related illness and mortality, and undermining livelihoods and wellbeing.



Air pollution: Air pollution continues to pose a major health threat in New Zealand, with a high burden of disease and premature deaths linked to exposure to fossil fuel and biomass-derived PM_{2.5}. Transitioning to clean energy could significantly reduce these risks.

With the threats of climate change growing, protecting people's health and survival demands simultaneous and unprecedented efforts to advance adaptation and mitigation, and requires an "all hands on deck" approach.

Heat and health

Exposure to high temperatures threatens lives and health, increasing the risk of heat-related illness and mortality particularly among vulnerable groups. Heat stress also reduces labour capacity, undermining livelihoods and the social determinants of health. In New Zealand, heatwave exposure continues to rise, placing growing pressure on health systems.

10.9

In 2024, people in New Zealand were exposed to 10.9 heatwave days each, on average. Of these, 6.8 (62%) would not have been expected to occur without climate change. (Indicator 1.1.1)



In 2024, adults over age 65 and children younger than 1 year of age experienced 324% and 168% more person-days of heatwaves respectively, compared to the equivalent demographic in 1986-2005. (Indicator 1.1.1)

2.6M

For 2024, heat exposure resulted in a loss of approximately 2.6 million potential labour hours, 230% more than the annual average in 1990-1999, with construction and agriculture sectors accounting for 63.4% and 33% of these losses, respectively. (Indicator 1.1.3)



In 2024, lost earnings in the construction sector reached US\$40.8 million, while agriculture added another US\$15.9 million in losses. (Indicator 4.1.3).

Extreme weather events and sea level rise

Populations are vulnerable to both the effects of sea-level rise and extreme weather events, threatening both direct health impacts as well as indirect impacts of population migration and displacement. Droughts, floods, and storms are increasing in frequency and severity due to climate change. These events degrade air quality, disrupt food and water systems, and elevate risks of respiratory, cardiovascular, and infectious diseases. In New Zealand, health systems face rising demand during and after such events.



From 2020-2024, 30% of New Zealand land area experienced, on average, at least 1 month of extreme drought per year. (Indicator 1.2.2) These recurring droughts threaten food and water security, strain ecosystems, and increase the risk of wildfires, posing serious challenges to health, especially for rural and Indigenous communities who are more directly dependent on natural resources.



14,096 people in New Zealand were displaced by weather disaster in 2023. ** This level of displacement underscores the growing human toll of climate change, with extreme weather events disrupting lives, livelihoods, and communities, particularly affecting vulnerable populations with limited capacity to recover and adapt.



In 2024, approximately 48,000 people were living less than 1m above sea level in New Zealand. (Indicator 2.2.4)

Energy transition and health co-benefits

Continued use of fossil fuels and biomass contributes to high levels of air pollution, increasing the risk of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, adverse pregnancy outcomes, and premature death. In New Zealand, transitioning to clean energy could significantly reduce disease burden and healthcare demand.



In 2022, fossil fuels still accounted for 99.7% of all road transport energy, and electricity accounted for only 0.3%. (Indicator 3.1.3) This overwhelming reliance on fossil fuels in transport not only drives greenhouse gas emissions but also contributes to air pollution and associated health risks.



In 2022, New Zealand had 8.4 Mt of greenhouse gas emissions from the healthcare sector. This was a 44% increase from 2016. (Indicator 3.5) Without targeted decarbonisation efforts, the sector risks contributing to the very climate-related health threats it seeks to address, undermining long-term resilience and equity in health outcomes.



New Zealand had a net-negative carbon revenue in 2023, indicating that fossil fuel subsidies were higher than carbon prices. New Zealand allocated a net total of US\$ 1 billion in subsidies 2023 alone. (Indicator 4.3.2)

Romanello M, Walawender M, Hsu S-C, et al. The 2025 report of the Lancet Countdown on health and climate change. Lancet 2025; published online Oct 29. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(25\)01919-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(25)01919-1).

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