Human Health

Scientists at the National Center for Atmospheric Research are investigating the complex interactions among meteorological, ecological, and social processes in order to reduce the impacts of weather variability and climate change on human health. This research is performed with collaborators from U.S. and international universities and agencies, and has the following objectives:

- To determine vulnerabilities and appropriate adaptations to weather-and-climate-related threats to human health.
- To understand the complex relationships between climate variability and the health of ecosystems.
- To help educate the next generation of researchers in these interdisciplinary areas.

Components

The NCAR Weather, Climate and Health Program has several components:

- Addressing health risks from extreme heat in major cities including Phoenix, Arizona, Houston, Texas and Toronto, Canada. This research is aimed at identifying the areas of cities where health risks are highest due to a combination of high heat and social vulnerability, and at developing solutions for reducing the impacts of extreme heat on urban populations.

- Assessing the potential for the dengue virus vector mosquito Aedes aegypti to expand in the Americas under a variety of climate-and-societal change scenarios. As warming continues, this human-dependent mosquito may move into cities that are currently too cool and dry for it to exist.

- Working in northern Ghana and across the African Sahel to reduce the burden of upper respiratory disease and meningitis. This research includes investigating the use of clean cooking technologies to improve regional air quality, and developing a weather forecasting capability that specifically informs meningitis vaccination campaigns.

- Modeling fluctuations of human plague cases in Uganda, which are linked to weather variations. This work, aimed at improving plague surveillance and prevention, includes a component in which traditional healers in the West Nile region of Uganda are trained to recognize plague symptoms.

- Establishment of a joint postdoctoral program between NCAR and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Fellows spend a year at each institution doing collaborative research on climate-sensitive vector-borne diseases, or environmental health. The program provides interdisciplinary training to address climate-related health issues.

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NCAR researchers are collaborating with scientists at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to develop models to simulate human plague risks that are caused by climatic factors.