24 Hours of Reality™

COUNTDOWN TO THE FUTURE

Countdown to the Future: HEALTH

THE CLIMATE CRISIS IS A HEALTH CRISIS

Today, the World Health Organization calls the climate crisis "the greatest threat to global health in the twenty-first century."

No wonder either. Between the dirty fossil fuels poisoning our air and water and the way that burning oil, coal, and natural gas is heating up the atmosphere and throwing Nature out of balance, the world is becoming a more dangerous place by the day.

All this before we even get to COVID-19. Because while fossil fuels and the climate crisis played no role in creating the pandemic, research points to the ways they can work together to help spread the virus and make it even deadlier.

Worst of all, both COVID-19 and climate impacts from polluted air to lethal heatwaves hit the most physically vulnerable — our children, seniors, and people already suffering from other conditions — along with poor families and people of color especially hard.

It doesn't have to be this way. There's a better and healthy future out there — where the air you breathe doesn't depend on the color of your skin and kids can safely play outside all summer long – but reaching it depends on us.

CHOKING ON FOSSIL FUELS

Burning fossil fuels isn't just heating up the atmosphere, it's also polluting the air we breathe. Already, outdoor air pollution from these and other sources kills *over 4 million people each year*.

In the US, the threat is especially pronounced for Black Americans, with about 68 percent living within 30 miles of a coal-fired power plant. These plants are terrible neighbors for anyone, releasing mercury, lead, particulates, and other pollutants that can lead to impacts from asthma to brain damage to cancer to premature death.

In the middle of a pandemic, these pollutants are doubly dangerous. Recent research suggests that Americans living with polluted air are more likely to die from the virus than those living in healthier environments. When you consider that 79 percent of Black Americans are more likely than Whites to live in a neighborhood where fossil fuel and industrial pollution is the single greatest threat to health, the injustice of fossil fuels couldn't be clearer.

THE HEAT IS KILLING US

The world is getting warmer. We've lived through the five hottest years on record . . . in the past five years. And not only are average temperatures rising, but so are the days of extreme heat.

Extreme heat does more than make us sweat. It can lead to heat exhaustion, heat stroke, and worsening cardiovascular issues. And these are no idle threats. From 1998–2017, heatwaves

killed more than 166,000 people worldwide. Over the past 30 years, extreme heat has killed more Americans each year on average than any other weather-related source.

Extreme heat can be especially dangerous and lethal for physically vulnerable populations like seniors and children and those working outside. Plus, inner cities get hit hardest, thanks to the urban heat island effect, where urban structures absorb so much heat that daytime temperatures can be up to 7 degrees Fahrenheit higher than in the country. When summer temperatures are already over 100, that can be the difference between life and death.

MORE DISEASE
It's not just more extreme weather we're seeing as temperatures rise. The warmer temperatures and the host of impacts they bring enable diseases to spread further and faster than ever before.

How? Warming can allow vectors — small organisms such as mosquitos or ticks that can carry diseases — to expand their habitat ranges into places that were once too cold for them to survive. Additionally, warmer temperatures can lead to these vectors maturing and reproducing faster, leading to more vectors that can infect humans.

It's not just the airborne diseases. Climate change is also creating more favorable conditions for painful and even deadly waterborne illness to spread with more heavy downpours and warmer weather. Each year, contaminated drinking water causes nearly 500,000 diarrheal deaths. In the US, waterborne pathogens cause an estimated 12-19 cases of acute gastrointestinal illness annually.

HELPING SPREAD THE VIRUS
When climate-fueled hurricanes or wildfires strike, people have to flee and sometimes take advantage of temporary shelter. In a world where COVID-19 is far from under control, these climate events can help spread infections as people are forced from safe and contained spaces.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?
First spread the word about how the climate crisis and fossil fuels combine to threaten our health

and deepen injustice across the planet. Sometimes it's hard to know where to start, so below is a simple story to use.

WE MUST CHANGE
- **Burning fossil fuels is causing a global climate crisis.** Greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels are causing global temperatures to rise, leading to stronger hurricanes, longer droughts, and increasingly lethal heatwaves.
- **The climate crisis has become a health crisis planet-wide, stretching providers and resources to the limit.** Catastrophic storms can cost lives and leave thousands injured. Fossil fuel pollution and warmer temperatures mean allergy and respiratory disease rates are increasing. Infectious diseases are spreading further and faster.
- **The most vulnerable suffer the most.** Sweltering temperatures and fossil fuel pollution can easily overwhelm young or compromised immune systems in children, the elderly, and the chronically ill. Poor families are typically the worst hit and first forgotten when hurricanes and floods strike.

WE CAN CHANGE
- **With renewables like wind and solar, we can power our lives destroying our planet.** Clean energy is affordable and abundant. More energy from the sun's rays strikes the earth every hour than humanity uses in an entire year. Globally, wind could supply the Earth's electricity needs 40 times over.

WE WILL CHANGE
- **The world is with us.** Seven in 10 Americans support strong government action on climate. Clear majorities worldwide see climate as *the* top threat today.

LEARN MORE
To learn more about how the climate crisis and fossil fuels threaten our health and future, request a digital presentation and discussion on climate solutions as part of *24 Hours of Reality: Countdown to the Future* on October 10-11. Presentations are free and a great place to start the conversation on how we can create a healthy future for all.