



Policy in brief: Climate change and women's health

This is a summary of a Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists [policy position](#) setting out the pivotal role of all four UK governments and health services in creating a liveable, healthy future for women and girls.

Recommendations in brief

- **The UK Government must deliver on its commitments under the Paris Agreement and significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions**, by accelerating policies which support every sector to transition to net zero, prioritising health and equity in these policies, and by rapidly phasing out support for fossil fuels.
- **The UK Government must take every opportunity to support women's health and gender equality in countries most vulnerable to climate change**, by restoring development spending to 0.7% of gross national income as soon as possible, delivering strong international climate finance commitments, and advocating for stronger international action to protect women's health and gender equality.
- **The governments across the UK must ensure the health service is both fully supported to decarbonise in line with wider UK net zero commitments, and well-prepared for the increasing climate-related risks to health and health service delivery.** A clear commitment to this goal must be supported by substantial capital investment in NHS estate and infrastructure, wider investment in women's health services and initiatives which are designed and developed with service users.
- **Each UK government must ensure robust adaptation plans are in place across all sectors to help prevent changes to the UK climate impacting women's health and pregnancy outcomes.** This includes ensuring access to healthcare during and after flooding and other weather events, considering pregnancy in planning for long-term adaptation to extreme heat, and preparing for future changes to disease risks.

Climate change is a substantial and growing threat to women's health

Climate change has created more weather and climate extremes, which both directly impact physical and mental health and access to healthcare, and increase the risks of problems like food insecurity, water scarcity, conflict, displacement and infectious diseases. **This leads to specific risks to women's health throughout their life course, disrupts access to essential sexual and reproductive healthcare, and causes and exacerbates health inequalities.**

Climate-related risks to women's health in the UK include:

- More extreme weather, particularly flooding and high temperatures, can have direct physical and mental health impacts and disrupt access to and delivery of health services.
- Rising rates of infectious and vector-borne diseases pose particular risks to health during pregnancy.
- Threats to UK food supply may make a healthy diet more unaffordable, or even inaccessible, shaping health throughout women's life course and in pregnancy and exacerbating health inequalities.

The health impacts on women living in regions most vulnerable to climate change include:

- Serious disruption to sexual and reproductive healthcare and safe maternity care, risking millions of unintended pregnancies, unsafe abortions and maternal deaths.
- Poverty, food insecurity and water stress directly caused by climate change shapes women's health outcomes throughout their life course and holds back progress on gender equality.
- Climate-related displacement and conflict increases risks of gender-based violence.

The RCOG is delivering a programme of work to support our membership to respond to the climate crisis and advocate for a healthier future for women and girls, which you can read about [on our website](#).