

## Environmental health

Environmental health risks are factors outside of the body that can affect a person's wellbeing and influence their behaviour. Examples include the quality of a person's air, food and water supply or their exposure to hazardous materials. Preventing or reducing the risk of illness, injury or disease in the community is essential to good environmental health.

### Environmental health risks

The term 'environmental health' refers to many different factors in a person's surroundings. Generally speaking, environmental health risks include problems with:

- Air quality
- Water quality
- Food quality and safety
- Waste disposal
- Hazardous substances
- Unsafe public spaces
- Housing conditions.

### Examples of environmental health risks

Environmental health covers many different factors in a person's surroundings. These can include:

- **Air pollution** – for example, smog, wood smoke and mould.
- **Water quality** – for example, grey water, tank water, fluoridation and drought.
- **Food quality** – for example, contamination and nutrition.
- **Chemicals** – for example, pesticides, farm chemicals, arsenic and CCA treated timber.
- **Metals** – for example, exposure to lead, mercury and cadmium.
- **Diseases from animals and insects (vector borne)** – for example, dengue fever, hendra virus, lyssavirus, Ross River fever and malaria.
- **Infectious diseases** – for example, viral infections like swine flu.
- **Natural hazards** – for example, solar radiation and extreme weather events.
- **Man-made structures** – for example, exposure to asbestos or electromagnetic radiation sources like mobile phones.
- **Occupational health** – for example, safety issues relating to the workplace such as noise pollution and hazardous waste.
- **Climate change** – for example, higher sea levels, increased soil salinity and increased temperatures.

### Improving environmental health for Australians

Preventing or reducing the risk of illness, injury or disease in the community is essential to good environmental health. An important way to achieve this is by improving the quality of people's surroundings.

Government and community environmental health programs aim to improve public health in a number of key areas. In Australia, the National Environmental Health Strategy 2007–2012 outlines the key areas requiring attention. These include:

- Emergencies
- Natural disasters
- Water supply

- Increased urban development
- Health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

## Where to get help

- Your local council
- Your doctor
- Environment Protection Authority Victoria Tel. (03) 9695 2777
- Office of Health Protection, Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing Tel. (02) 6289 1555 or 1800 020 103

## Things to remember

- Environmental health risks are factors outside of the body that can affect wellbeing or behaviour. These may include the quality of a person's air, food and water supply or their exposure to hazardous materials.
- Preventing or reducing the risk of illness, injury or disease in the community is essential to good environmental health.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

Department of Health - Environmental Health Unit

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