

Wisconsin Creates Local Adaptation Strategies for Weather-Related Emergencies

The Wisconsin Department of Health Services created nine subject-specific toolkits on climate and health to help local jurisdictions plan for and respond to extreme weather events.

To assist local governments in planning for and responding to extreme weather events, the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (WDHS) created a series of 9 subject-specific climate and health toolkits.¹ The toolkits cover a range of topics, including extreme heat and harmful algal blooms, to help support a more resilient Wisconsin at the local level.²

Prior to creating these toolkits, there was no centralized hub in Wisconsin for this type of information. WDHS partnered with the Wisconsin Association of Local Health Departments and Boards to help disseminate these toolkits across the state.

- The toolkits have been downloaded over 850 times since September 2016.
- Local health departments requested that the flood toolkit be translated into Spanish.

Steps Taken

- In order to support local health departments in Wisconsin, the WDHS Climate and Health Program created nine toolkits outlining specific steps to better prepare for and respond to extreme weather events.³ Working across the department's bureau of environmental and occupational health, a variety of subject matter experts provided technical knowledge for the toolkits and collaborated throughout their development. The toolkits also include resources from various federal agencies, such as the EPA and CDC.
- The topics covered in the toolkits include extreme heat, winter weather, floods, wildfires, chemical releases, and other scenarios.⁴ Within the toolkits, specific information on each topic area is included. For example, the extreme heat toolkit includes information on the definitions of different heat alerts, heat illness and symptoms, and populations vulnerable to heat.⁵
- Once published, the WDHS Climate and Health Program presented the toolkits at regional meetings of the Wisconsin Association of Local Health Departments and Boards, which assisted in getting the word out to local health departments.

Results

- Since September 2016, the toolkits have been accessed and downloaded over 850 times.
- Due to increased flooding events over the past year, local health departments have requested that the flood toolkit be translated into Spanish. This has triggered an effort to translate all 9 toolkits from English to Spanish.
- WDHS plans to survey local health departments about their knowledge and use of the toolkits in order to improve the quality and usefulness of the information contained in them.

Lessons Learned

- The toolkits are a useful way to present succinct and accurate information on various topics related to climate and health.
- The toolkits provided an opportunity to work with and provide support to local health departments in their preparedness and response efforts surrounding extreme weather events and weather-related emergencies.

- Partnering with local public health associations and health boards can help get the word out regarding new, innovative resources meant for local health departments.
- It is important to be mindful that English may not be the primary language for all populations and that translating these resources may lead to a greater impact. As a result, WDHS plans to translate all the toolkits into Spanish.
- WDHS plans to further improve on the existing toolkits by incorporating a health equity lens that addresses health disparities. To do this, WDHS has assembled an external health equity action team, comprised of representatives from certain priority populations, who will help update the existing toolkits and incorporate health equity considerations into them. Any new resources moving forward will also address health disparities.

To access the climate and health toolkits, visit: <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/climate/toolkits.htm>.

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<https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/climate/index.htm>

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¹ Wisconsin Department of Health Services. "Climate and Health Toolkits." Available at <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/climate/toolkits.htm>. Accessed 9-24-17.

² *ibid*

³ *ibid*

⁴ *ibid*

⁵ *ibid*