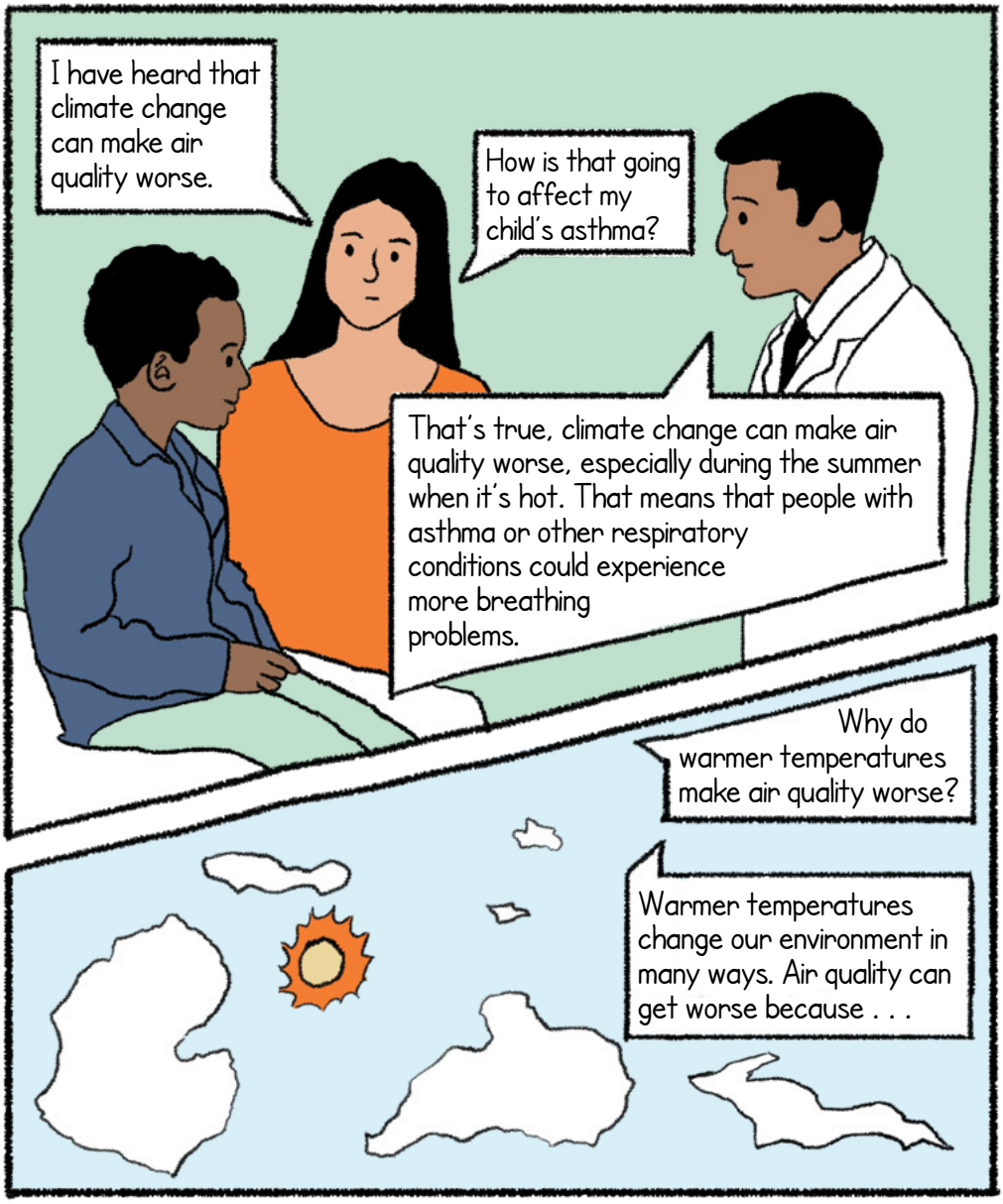
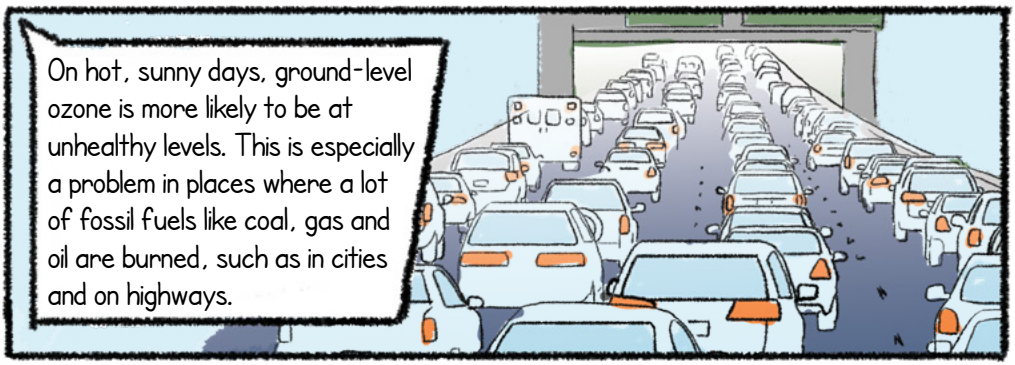
Talk About It

Can climate change make it harder to breathe?



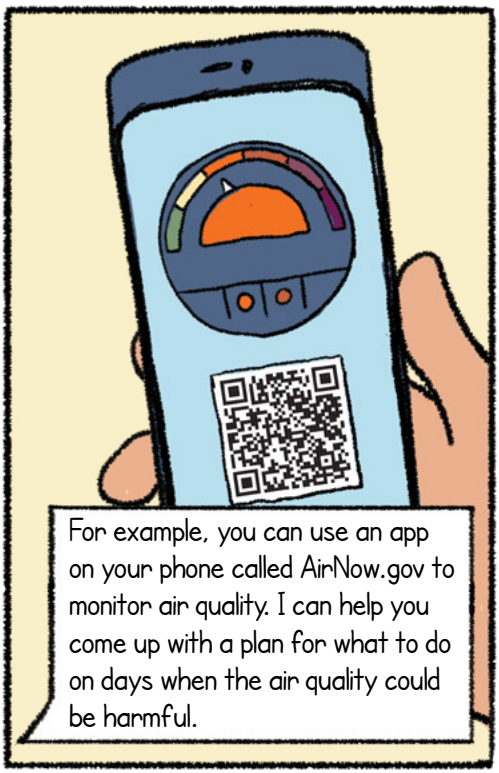

On hot, sunny days, ground-level ozone is more likely to be at unhealthy levels. This is especially a problem in places where a lot of fossil fuels like coal, gas and oil are burned, such as in cities and on highways.

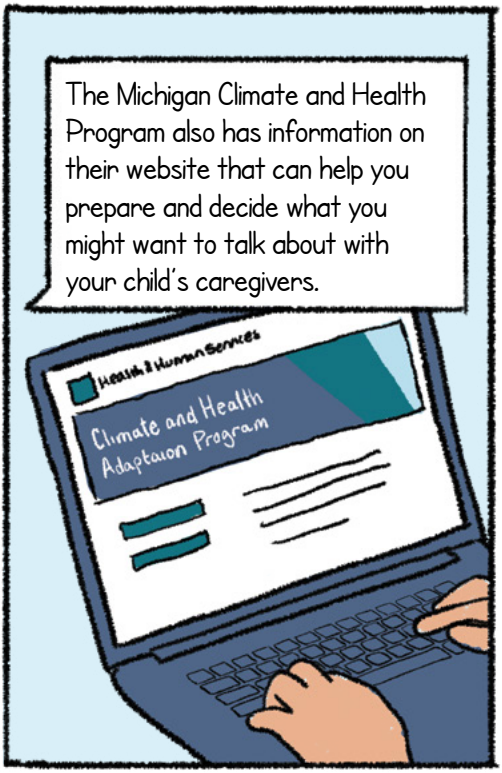

A warmer climate means longer growing seasons. That means trees and plants are producing pollen over a longer time, which extends the allergy season.


Hotter weather can mean more wildfires. Wildfire smoke contains very small particles that, when inhaled, can cause breathing problems, heart failure and sometimes can be fatal.


I grew up in Michigan and I've noticed some of these changes. What can I do?

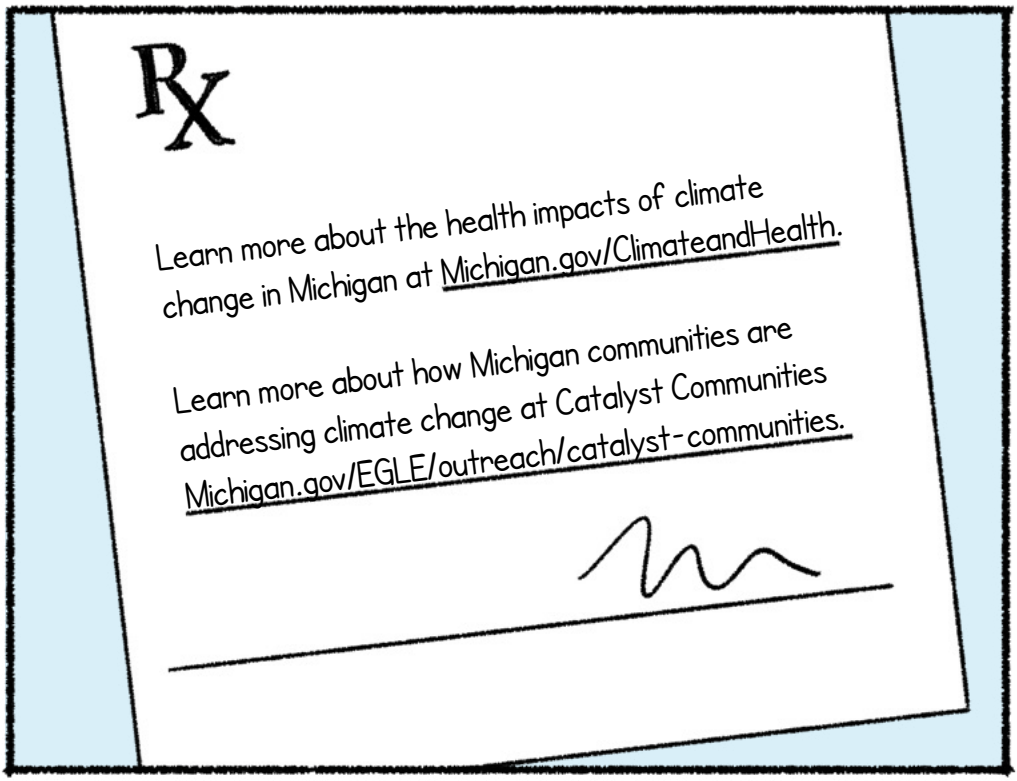

The good news is there are things you and your community can do to protect yourselves.


For example, you can use an app on your phone called AirNow.gov to monitor air quality. I can help you come up with a plan for what to do on days when the air quality could be harmful.


The Michigan Climate and Health Program also has information on their website that can help you prepare and decide what you might want to talk about with your child's caregivers.
Health & Human Services
Climate and Health Adaptation Program


It's helpful to know there are things I can do.


Good! I'm glad we talked about it.
If you're interested, I can point you toward more information that will tell you about climate change in Michigan.



MDHHS
Michigan Department of Health & Human Services

Climate and Health Quick Reference Guide

MDHHS Michigan Department of Health & Human Services

Respiratory Health

The impacts of climate change can make it harder to breathe, but there are things you can do to protect yourself when the air is lower quality.

Plan:

Talk with a health care provider now so you are ready on the days when the air is unhealthy. Some questions to consider asking your child's provider are:

- If my child is having breathing problems, how do I know when to go to the emergency room?
- How do I know when the air quality will impact my child's health?
- What can I do to improve the air quality inside my home on days we should stay inside?

Monitor:

Check the air quality index. You can do that at AirNow.gov, on most weather apps or with EPA's AirNow app. Keeping an eye on air quality conditions can give you some time to put plans into action.

Act:

Depending on the air quality index, you might:

- Stay home with an air filtration device turned on. If your home does not have an air filtration system that uses a MERV 13 filter or higher, consider putting an air filter in at least one room where you spend most of your time.
- Consider wearing a well-fitting N95 or P100 mask.
- Temporarily relocate to a place with better indoor air quality.
- Avoid adding pollutants to indoor air by:
  - Not smoking or vaping.
  - Not burning candles or incense.
- Avoid adding pollutants to outdoor air by:
  - Driving less.
  - Not idling your car.
  - Not using gas-powered lawn and garden equipment.

Climate change

can affect air quality in different ways that make it harder to breathe and increase the risk of heart and lung damage.

Learn more about climate change and health:

Ozone

On hot and sunny days, ground-level ozone is more likely to be at unhealthy levels. This is especially a problem in places where a lot of fossil fuels like coal, gas and oil are burned, such as in cities and on highways. Ground-level ozone is the main component in smog.

Wildfire Smoke

Hotter and drier conditions can cause wildfires. Smoke from wildfires contains small particles called PM2.5 that, when inhaled, can cause breathing problems, heart failure and sometimes can be fatal.

Mold

Climate change causes more flooding. Mold is common in houses that have flooded. For some people, mold can cause a stuffy nose, sore throat, coughing or wheezing, burning eyes or skin rash. People with asthma or mold allergies may have severe reactions.

Pollen

Climate change leads to longer growing seasons, and that means trees and plants are producing pollen earlier and for a longer time. This extends the allergy season.

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