



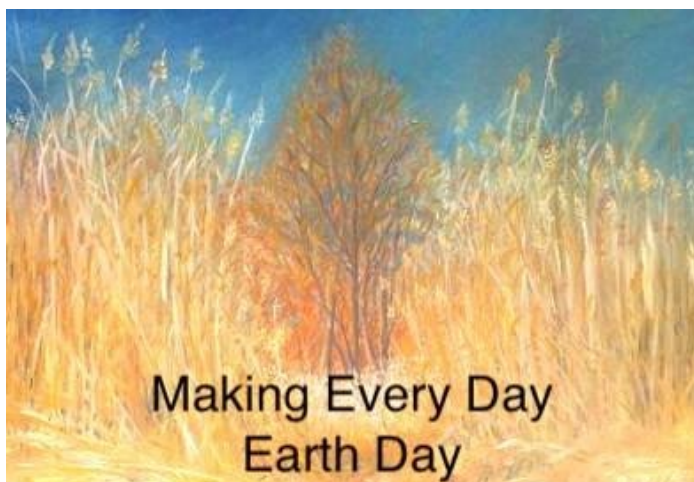
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August 1, 2020

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## COVID-19 and Climate Change

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**“Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine the world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next.” - [Arundhati Roy](#)**

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The COVID-19 pandemic has shone light on various pre-existing systemic flaws, and it has also presented us with new challenges as well as opportunities. Seeing recent examples of how dramatically and quickly individuals and institutions have adapted to this crisis prompts us to wonder how we can take further measures to positively impact our health and environment.

There are various connections between climate change and diseases such as COVID-19, starting with outbreaks. At this time, it is believed that COVID-19 was transmitted to humans from an undetermined animal species. For years, experts have been calling attention to dangers posed by rising species extinction and the destruction of wildlife habitats, including rising human exposure to zoonotic diseases. See this video for illustrated examples.



Global warming, which in turn exacerbates COVID-19 symptoms as high temperatures raise levels of ozone and other air pollutants. Extreme heat also increases pollen and other aeroallergen levels, which can trigger asthma. In April, the The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issued a warning that people with moderate to severe asthma may be at higher risk of becoming seriously ill and dying from COVID-19.

However, a recent [report](#) on the Sustainable Development Goals and COVID-19 found that the pandemic has led to some temporary benefits due to lower air pollution levels, such as significant drops in CO2 emissions around the world. The report recommends that the restoration of economic activity should aim to protect these gains.

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"This is a chance for nations to recover better, to include the most vulnerable in those plans, and a chance to shape the 21st century economy in ways that are clean, green, healthy, just, safe and more resilient." [Patricia Espinosa](#) , [UN Climate Change](#)

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## Political Landscape

### International:

In May, world health professionals from from 90 different countries signed a [letter](#) to the leaders of G20 nations calling for a pragmatic, science-based approach to managing the COVID-19 pandemic, and providing guidance for a healthy recovery from this crisis. Among other measures, they ask that national chief medical officers and chief scientific advisors be directly involved in the production of all economic stimulus packages.

Some governments are planning their post-COVID economic recovery plans to boost low-carbon industries. Early research [findings](#) show that the following G20 countries have made national and subnational-level public funding commitments to clean energy exceeding those to fossil fuels: the United Kingdom, Germany, Brazil, Japan and China.

A new [position paper](#) by The Elders explains the necessity of multilateralism to overcome this pandemic and reshape the world after COVID-19. In the forward, Mary Robinson writes, "The virus will not be overcome unless states work together, pooling resources and expertise to strengthen health systems, support the vital work of the World Health Organization, and encourage a spirit of solidarity."

The WHO has a new [global strategy](#) on health, environment and climate change, which features an "empowered health sector". This includes using a public health framework, tailored to national circumstances, to focus action on upstream determinants of health and climate change in an integrated and mainstreamed approach across all sectors.

### National:

As of July 15th of this year, 68 environmental rules and regulations have been officially reversed, revoked or otherwise rolled back by the Trump administration, and 32 additional [rollbacks](#) are still in progress. The largest number of these regulatory changes are to air pollution and emissions.

The CARES Act does not provide targeted programs to assist the renewable energy industry. Instead, it enables billions of dollars to aid the fossil fuel industry. The proposed [ReWIND Act](#) seeks to amend the CARES Act to block the fossil fuel industry's abilities to benefit from it.

As Congress works on post-COVID-19 plans, American health and medical professionals are asking legislators to reject efforts to roll back key health and environmental protections. They urge our country's leaders to [build back better](#), including transitioning to zero-emissions vehicles, and funding pedestrian-friendly community development projects.

There is also increasing support for an eco-friendly infrastructure package. On July 1st, the US House of Representatives passed the [Moving Forward Act](#). If approved by the Senate, it would include clean energy aid in federal recovery efforts.

The lack of US cooperation in international efforts to address COVID-19 and climate change severely hinders the success of these global endeavors. The Trump administration is currently facing fierce criticism for its recent, formal plan to [withdraw](#) our nation from the World Health Organization (WHO).

**"Coronavirus:  
What are climate  
activists doing  
now?"**



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### **Some Steps We Can Take**

#### **Reducing CO2 emissions**

As many of us have now worked from home for the first time, we can explore the possibilities of continuing that practice beyond COVID-19 quarantine. This is a prime time to promote the approval of remote work options in our workplaces.

#### **Produce Food Locally**

At the start of the pandemic, grocery store shelves were stripped bare as people stocked up on food. Since then, there has been a significant rise in home gardening to cultivate food. We must do what we can to support local food production, as it reduces CO2 emission, increases food security, and promotes healthy eating.

For example, The MercyOne Community Healing Garden, located next to its Cancer Center in Clive, provides fresh, organic produce for cancer patients. The garden is also an educational tool utilized by oncology dietitians to teach patients about the health benefits of a plant-based diet.

#### **Social Media**

Stay updated and engage in conversations using: #RebuildBetter #RecoverBetter #GreenRecovery #SustainableRecovery #BuildBackBetter and #ClimateStrikeOnline

#### **Political Action**

It is crucial that we demand our country fully invest in domestic and international efforts to address climate change and improve public health. We can follow and respond to calls for actions from organizations working on these intersecting issues, such as this EDF Action campaign: "[We need to rebuild better. Together.](#)"

Staying abreast of clean energy sector efforts to influence post-COVID-19 planning can enhance communications with our representatives. Here are a couple of examples: the [letter](#) to Congress from the Solar Energy Industries Association, and the wind industry's [statement](#) on its vision for COVID-19 economic recovery.

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### **[Online Survey for Health Professionals on a Healthy Recovery](#)**

The WHO and George Mason University invite health professionals globally to participate in a brief survey about their country's - and the world's - efforts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic and other public health emergencies.

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**Learn More**

["Back to normal? Building Community Resilience after COVID-19"](#) (August 2020) *The Lancet*

["Recover Better: Economic and Social Challenges and Opportunities"](#) (July 22, 2020) *United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs*

["The Climate Crisis and Covid-19 — A Major Threat to the Pandemic Response"](#) (July 15, 2020) *The New England Journal of Medicine*

["Sweltering in Place: COVID-19, Extreme Heat, and Environmental Justice"](#) video of hearing (July 14, 2020) *US House of Representatives Committee on Science, Space & Technology*

["'I Can't Breathe' is About More Than Police Violence"](#) (July 10, 2020) *Moms Clean Air Force*

["Push EPA to Attend to Air Pollution and Protect the Lives and Well-being of Iowans"](#) (July 10, 2020) *Des Moines Register*

["Jane Goodall on Conservation, Climate Change and COVID-19: 'If we carry on with business as usual, we're going to destroy ourselves'"](#) (July 2, 2020) *CBS News*

["A People's Orientation to a Regenerative Economy: Protect, Repair, Invest and Transform"](#) (June 2020) *Indigenous Environmental Network*

["Beyond Recovery: Towards 2030"](#) (June 22, 2020) *United Nations Development Programme*

["Tracking How the World's 'Green Recovery' Plans Aim to Cut Emissions"](#) (June 16, 2020) *Carbon Brief*

["Greening the Post-pandemic Recovery in the G20"](#) (June 15, 2020) *Environmental and Resource Economics*

["Oil & Gas Win, Clean Energy Loses in U.S. COVID-19 Response"](#) (June 10, 2020) *World Resources Institute*

["As the Rest of the World Plans a Green Recovery, America Is Once Again Falling Behind"](#) (May 15, 2020) *Time*

["Outbreak: Epidemics in a Connected World"](#) (exhibition virtual tour) *Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History*

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