



## Climate change may increase spread of diseases in B.C.: report

By Helen Halbert

Publish Date: June 22, 2009

In a paper entitled [Climate Change and Health in British Columbia](#), five researchers with the Pacific Institute for Climate Solutions hypothesize what the B.C. of 2050 will look like.

According to data on how climate change has affected similar regions, B.C. will play host to a motley collection of environmental problems, including rising sea levels, massive flooding, retreating glaciers, forest fires, landslides, and increased air pollution.

The authors of the report, dated November 2008 and commissioned by the B.C. government, predict that many of these changes will have devastating consequences for British Columbians' health—to say nothing of animal populations. Landslides will contaminate water supplies with sediment deposits. Higher temperatures and more precipitation will result in the introduction and expansion of diseases normally characteristic of warmer climates, such as malaria, Lyme disease, West Nile, and—hot on the heels of an expected influx of rodents—Hantavirus Pulmonary Syndrome.

At particular risk will be the elderly, the young, and those living in remote areas of the province. Given that this applies to approximately 30 percent of the population, the researchers concluded in [a press release](#) issued today (June 22) that “rural B.C. is a climate-change time bomb waiting to go off”.

On the plus side, select areas of the province will benefit from warmer temperatures in the form of longer growing seasons for a larger range of crops. According to projections of a “moderate climate-change scenario”, 2020 will see “cereals, cabbage, and potatoes, in the central interior, and corn and tomatoes along the Fraser River valley”. By 2050, “these latter crops may be growable in the Peace River region”. Of course, new fungal pathogens will be drawn in by the warmer, wetter climates, too.

According to the report, climate-related natural disasters from 1999 and 2002 cost the province approximately \$10 million each year. Between 2003 and 2005, that number rose to \$86 million. Still, research on climate change in B.C. is limited. In the press release, the authors noted that the World Health Organization and governments often neglect regional approaches to climate change, in favour of “analyzing the effects of climate change in the developing world”.

Two of the five authors of the report, SFU health scientist Tim Takaro and earth scientist Diana Allen, will discuss their findings, as well as the need for a “made-in-B.C.” climate change and health research program at an event on Friday (June 26). The event is hosted by the B.C. Rural and Remote Health Research Network and the B.C. Environmental and Occupational Health Research Network. It will take place from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. in Asia Pacific Hall at SFU's Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue. Registration is required.

---

**Source URL:** <http://www.straight.com/article-236334/climate-change-may-increase-spread-diseases-bc-report>