

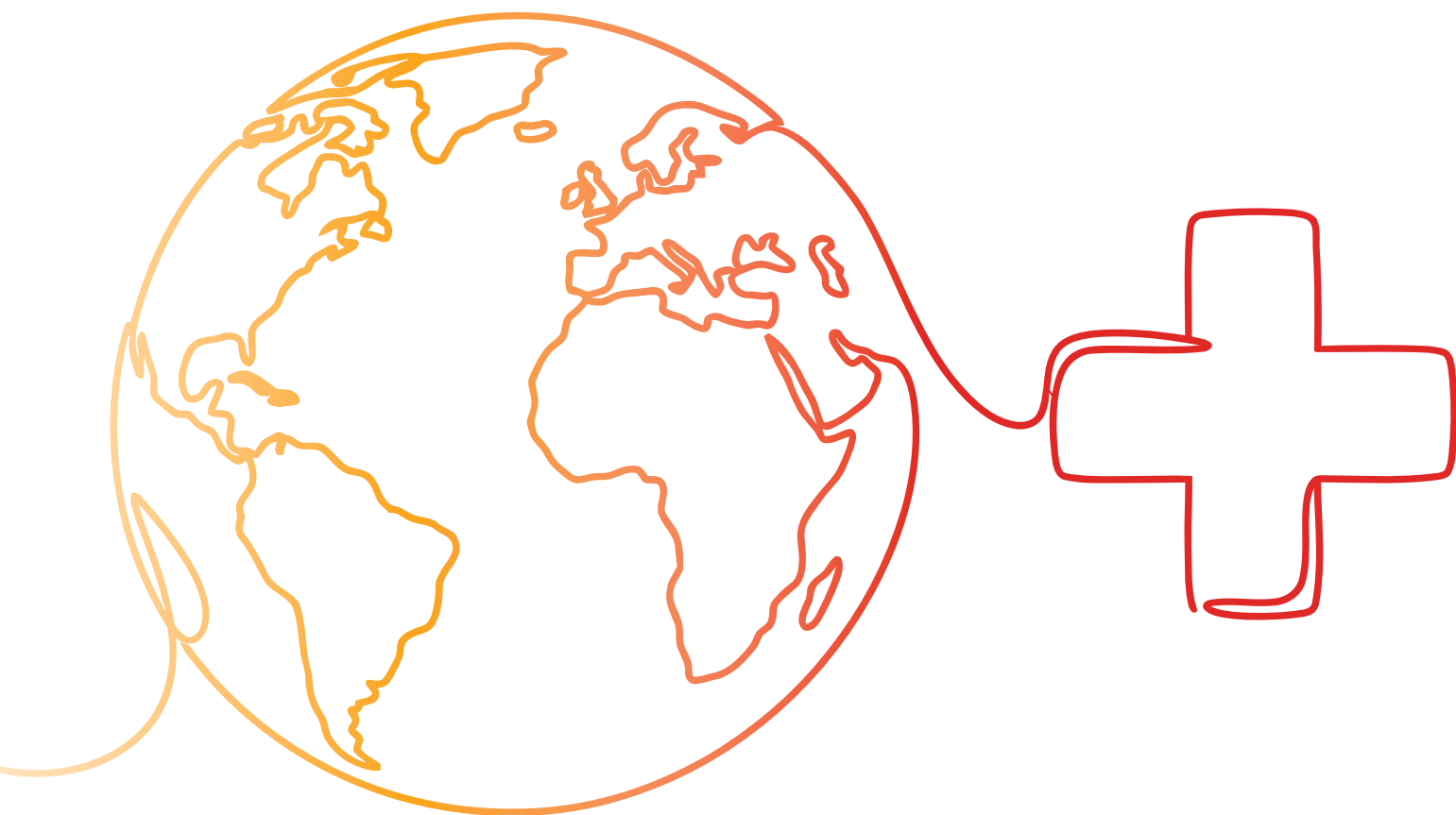
# Health and climate change



## Why we should talk about health and climate change

### Climate change is affecting our health today

- Our planet is warming rapidly due to greenhouse gas emissions from human activities (e.g., the burning of fossil fuels). Climate change is linked to extreme weather events, water and food insecurity, poor air quality and more.
- Climate change impacts our health in numerous ways: it increases the frequency of communicable disease such as cholera, dengue, diarrhoeal disease and malaria; of non-communicable diseases, like asthma and stroke; and of mental health conditions and trauma from extreme weather events, including droughts, floods and heatwaves.
- Climate change disrupts health systems by increasing the frequency of extreme weather events that damage healthcare infrastructure, cause power cuts and disrupt or break down cold chains. Therefore, it is important to maintain essential healthcare services close to populations that are in the most vulnerable situations.
- You can make a difference by talking about climate change in your communities. You have a unique role in helping your communities understand the impacts of climate change on health and how to protect themselves.



## How to communicate on health and climate change to communities<sup>1</sup>

### Before you start talking, consider your audience and goal.

Who are you speaking with? It could be community members, policymakers, friends and family or social media followers. What is your goal? It might be to empower, raise awareness, convince, inform or encourage.

### Keep your message simple and focus on human health.

Simple messages are often the most effective. Presenting climate change as a health issue helps your audience see climate change as a local, tangible problem that they are facing right now.

### Tell stories to connect with people.

People can find it hard to connect with facts and statistics, while they relate more easily to stories. If you have personal experience observing the health impacts of climate change, share the story with the community (e.g., In 2015, we had the worst floods in history. We saw a sharp rise in cases of diarrhoea and malaria ...).

### Empower people to make good decisions about their health and community.

Let people know how they can protect themselves and their communities from the health impacts of climate change.

## Vulnerable populations

The health risks posed by climate change can vary both between and within regions and communities, contributing to health inequalities. While everyone is susceptible to the impacts of climate change, certain groups are more vulnerable than others.

### Who are the vulnerable populations?

- Elderly people
- Infants and children
- Pregnant or breastfeeding women
- People with pre-existing health conditions
- People living with disabilities
- Families who have fled their homes because of fighting and are living in camps or temporary shelters
- Women and girls, who face extra barriers to accessing healthcare and are at higher risk of violence during crises
- Small scale farmers, herders and fishing communities
- People living in low-lying areas along rivers
- People who work outdoors in hot climates

## Key messages: Health and climate change

### Sudan

Sudan is the third largest country in Africa. The weather and climate are very different, depending on where you live:

- In the north, it is extremely hot and dry – making dehydration and heatstroke a constant risk.
- In the centre and east, communities suffer from both droughts and floods, sometimes in the same year – bringing malnutrition and malaria along with waterborne diseases.
- In the south, heavy rains and floods are common – increasing the spread of diseases like cholera, dengue, diarrhoea, typhoid and malaria.

These health risks are getting worse across the country because of climate change.

Sudan is also going through a serious crisis. Fighting has forced nearly 13 million people to flee their homes ([UNHCR, n.d.](#)). These families, living in camps or with host communities, are the most at risk when droughts, floods or heatwaves strike. Destroyed health clinics, lack of clean water and overcrowded shelters mean that any disease outbreak can spread quickly.

## 1. Flooding

### Primary health impacts of flooding:

- Cholera, diarrhoea, typhoid
- Malaria, dengue
- Injuries, drowning
- Damage to health facilities
- Mental health effects (anxiety, fear, trauma)

### *What is happening?*

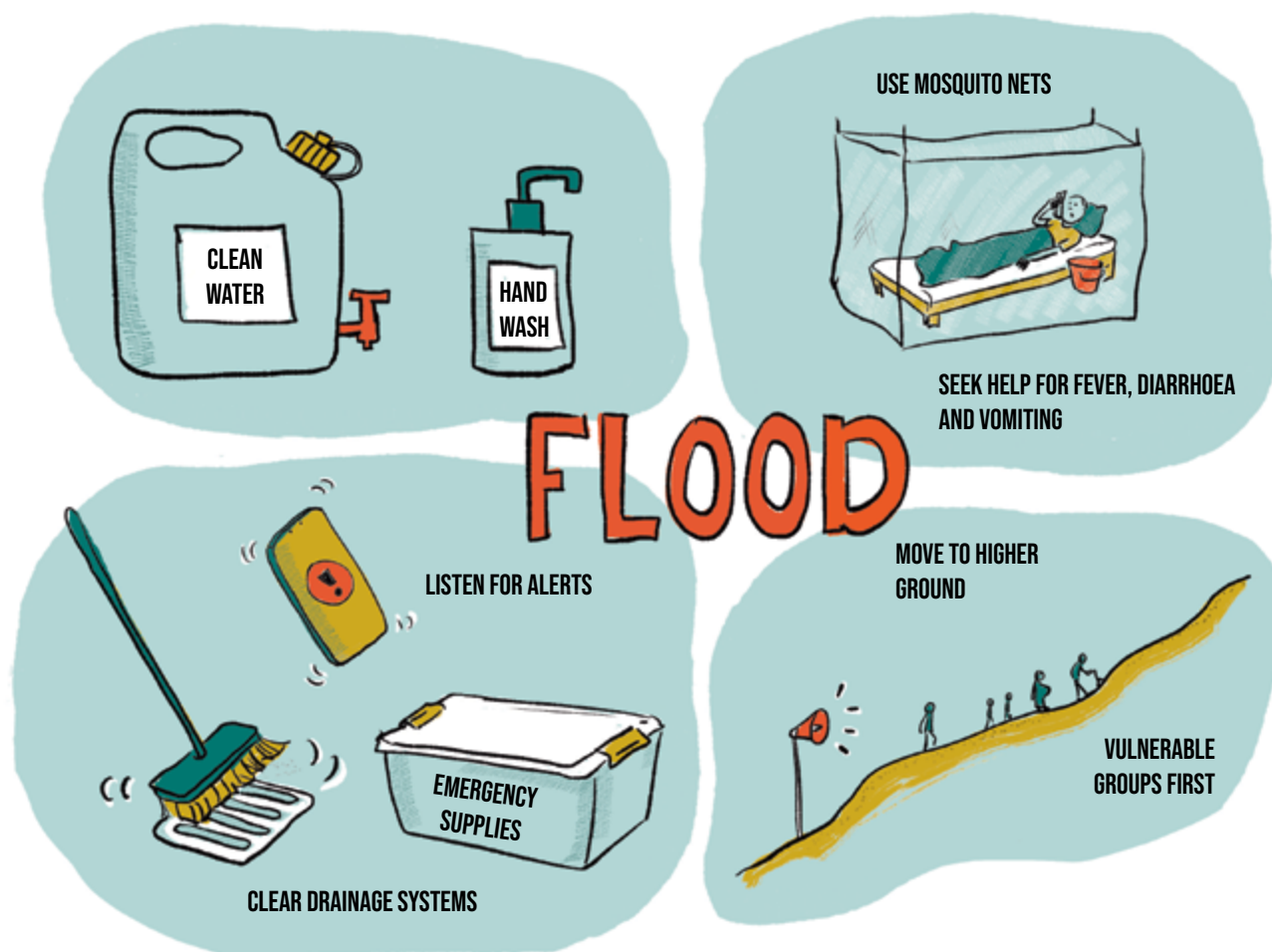
- Every year, floods hit Sudan along the River Nile; often as sudden flash floods that strike with little warning. Due to climate change, these floods are happening more often and getting worse. In 2024, flooding hit more than 15 states, washing away homes, polluting water and damaging health clinics ([UNOCHA, 2024](#)).

### *How does flooding make us sick?*

- Dirty floodwater gets into wells and water sources, spreading diseases like cholera, diarrhoea and typhoid. In a country where millions of people already lack access to safe toilets, floods make this even worse – when latrines are damaged or destroyed, disease spreads even faster. After a flood, mosquitoes breed in puddles of stagnant water, so cases of dengue and malaria often go up in the weeks that follow ([Elsanousi et al., 2018](#); [UNICEF, 2025](#)).
- People who have fled their homes and are living in crowded camps are most at risk. Floods also cause injuries and drowning, and the fear and loss that come with them can affect mental health.

### *What can you do?*

- Do not drink floodwater or use it for cooking. Boil your water, use purification tablets or filter it. Keep drinking water in a clean, covered container. Carefully clean water containers whenever they are empty, remembering to replace the cover.
- Wash your hands with soap and water, especially before eating and after using the toilet. Sleep under a mosquito net. Empty any containers around your home that collect water.
- If anyone in your family gets a fever, diarrhoea or vomiting after a flood, find a health worker quickly. Do not wait and see because these illnesses can get serious – fast.



## 2. Extreme heat

### Primary health impacts of extreme heat:

- Dehydration
- Heatstroke
- Other heat-related illnesses (heat cramps, heat exhaustion)
- Worsening existing conditions (heart disease, kidney disease, diabetes)
- Mental health effects (anxiety, exhaustion, irritability)

### *What is happening?*

- Sudan is one of the hottest places on Earth, and it is getting hotter because of climate change. In the north of the country, temperatures often go above 43°C in summer (Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre, 2024). Nights are getting hotter too, so our bodies do not get a chance to cool down. People living in camps or makeshift shelters with little shade or water feel this the most.

### *How does extreme heat make us sick?*

- When it gets too hot, our bodies lose water quickly, which can make us feel dizzy and weak. In serious cases, this can lead to heatstroke, which can be life-threatening. Heat also worsens existing illnesses such as heart disease, kidney disease and diabetes, and is extra dangerous for pregnant women and young children. It also affects how we feel, making us tired, anxious and on edge. This is even harder for families who have already lost their homes and are living through conflict.

### *What can you do?*

- Drink water throughout the day, even when you do not feel thirsty. Try to stay out of the sun during the hottest hours. Rest in the shade, wear loose-fitting, light-coloured clothing and cover your head when outside.
- Check on your elderly neighbours, young children, pregnant women and anyone who is ill. If someone seems confused, is breathing fast, or has hot dry skin during the heat, this is an emergency. Move them to a cool place and get help straight away.



### 3. Drought

#### Primary health impacts of drought:

- Cholera, diarrhoea, typhoid
- Skin and eye infections
- Mental health effects
- Dust storms – breathing difficulties, eye irritation, meningitis

#### *What is happening?*

- In many parts of Sudan – especially Darfur, Kassala, Kordofan and the Red Sea State – rains often come too late, are too short, or do not come at all. Because of climate change, droughts are expected to become more frequent, longer and more intense by the end of this century ([Haile et al., 2020](#)).

#### *How does extreme heat make us sick?*

- When water sources dry up, people are forced to drink unsafe water from rivers, ponds or other unclean sources, which can spread diseases like cholera, diarrhoea and typhoid. Drought can also cause skin and eye infections as people wash less frequently when water is scarce. The stress and worry of not having enough water also takes a serious toll on mental health.
- Drought dries out the land and kills vegetation, which makes dust storms more frequent and intense ([Mirzabaev et al., 2019](#)). Dust storms can cause coughing, breathing difficulties and eye irritation. People with asthma or other breathing problems are especially at risk. Dust storms can also increase the risk of meningitis ([Aghababaeian et al., 2021](#)).

#### *What can you do?*

- Always use the cleanest water available. Boil it, filter it, or use purification tablets. Keep water stored in a clean, covered container.
- Stay in touch with health workers and community volunteers in your area, especially during dry seasons when water becomes even harder to find.
- During a dust storm, stay indoors and close windows and doors. If you must go outside, cover your nose and mouth with a cloth. People with breathing difficulties like asthma should be extra careful and stay inside.
- Keep food safe from flies: always cover food, keep cooking and eating areas clean, and dispose of waste properly to help prevent illness.



## 4. Conflict, crisis and displacement

### Primary health impacts on displaced populations:

- Malnutrition and food insecurity
- Infectious disease outbreaks (cholera, diarrhoea, malaria)
- Mental health and psychosocial distress
- Injuries and lack of access to emergency care
- Health system collapse and attacks on healthcare facilities

In Sudan, the effects of climate change and conflict go hand in hand. When water and land become scarce because of drought, it can cause tension between communities. And when fighting destroys health clinics, water systems and food supplies, people have nothing to fall back on when floods or heatwaves strike.

### *Why are displaced people most at risk?*

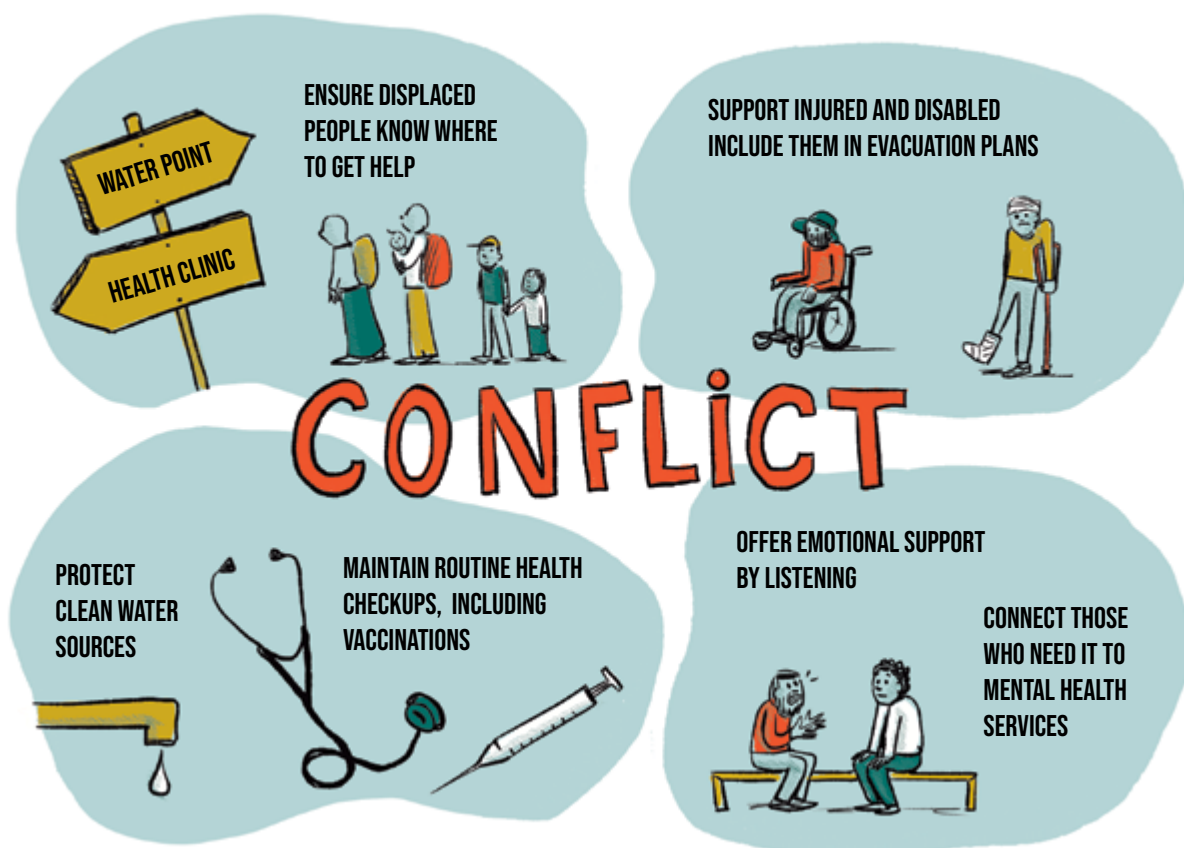
- Families who have fled their homes because of fighting are living in crowded shelters with limited food and water, poor sanitation conditions and little or no access to healthcare. In 2025, more than 30 million people (over half of Sudan's population) needed humanitarian assistance, including 16 million children ([OCHA, 2025](#)). In these conditions, diseases spread quickly, children are at high risk of malnutrition, and women and girls face extra dangers including violence.
- When people have lost their homes, their livelihoods and sometimes their loved ones, the emotional toll can be enormous, but mental health and psychosocial support is rarely available.
- When clinics and hospitals are damaged or destroyed, there is nowhere to go when a child gets sick during a flood, or when someone collapses from the heat. Since fighting began in 2023, there have been more than 500 attacks on Sudan's healthcare system ([WHO, 2025](#)). And people who have moved to unfamiliar places often do not know where to find help.

### *What can you do?*

- Make sure that the people who are most cut-off, as well as those who cannot travel easily to a health post, know where to get help. Share information about nearby clinics, water points and health workers, especially with families who have just arrived in the area.
- Remind families to keep up with their children's vaccinations and nutrition check-ups, even if they have moved. And remember listening to someone who is struggling, and helping them feel less alone, is also a form of care.

**Remember: adapt these messages to where you are.**

Ethiopia is a large and diverse country. A community in the Somali lowlands faces very different threats from one in the Amhara highlands. Use these messages as a starting point and adjust them to reflect what people in your community are experiencing.



## Extra messages

### Food insecurity and malnutrition

#### *What is happening?*

- Sudan is already one of the most food insecure countries in the world and this is getting worse. Climate change is playing a growing role: droughts are destroying harvests and killing livestock that families depend on for food; while floods wash away crops, contaminate water sources and damage stored food. At the same time, conflict has cut off millions of families from markets and food supplies ([FAO & WFP, 2024](#)).

#### *How does food insecurity make us sick?*

- When there is not enough food, young children suffer first. A child who does not eat enough can quickly become malnourished, which is dangerous and can cause lasting harm to their growth and development. Pregnant and breastfeeding women are also at high risk.

#### *What can you do?*

- Monitor young children. Warning signs of malnutrition include looking very thin, swollen legs or feet weakness, and loss of appetite. If you see these signs, seek help straight away. The sooner a child gets help, the better.
- Give the best available food first to young children and pregnant or breastfeeding women. Stay in touch with health workers and nutrition teams in your area.