



The Kid Angle

Kid-focused news from First Focus on Children

Three ways to make Earth Day count for kids **April 20, 2023**

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Earth Day, which comes around again this Saturday, April 22, has been going on since 1970. But it was only last year that Congress finally made a serious commitment to fight climate change and secure the environment for our children's health and safety, now and in the future.

The Inflation Reduction Act committed \$369 billion to climate solutions and environmental justice – the largest investment of its kind in U.S. history. Lawmakers must ensure the money goes to where it's needed most, including to children, who suffer disproportionately from the impacts of environmental pollution and climate change.

Children are not just small adults – their behaviors and physiology mean that they're **more susceptible to nearly every adverse effect of the climate crisis.**

- Children's unique physiology makes them **more likely to suffer from heat stroke or die** due to extreme heat.
- Chronic exposure to polluted air can cause **life-long damage** to children's growing lungs, and harm their **respiratory, cardiovascular, and immune systems.**
- Children **drink more water** in relation to their body weight than adults, making them more susceptible to contaminants — yet research shows that water sources at **44% of schools** contain elevated levels of lead, which can lead to complications like **brain and kidney damage, learning disabilities, and delayed development** .
- Natural disasters such as floods, tornados, hurricanes and other extreme weather events — all increasing as the climate shifts — often **cause anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder in children,** especially those under the age of eight.

As with many issues, **children from low-income communities and children of color experience these environmental injustices at higher rates than their wealthy or white peers, struggling with pollution-induced asthma, lead poisoning, certain cancers, and developmental issues.**

The **United Nations recently reported** that quick and sustained action can stave off the worst of the climate crisis for children and all people, in the U.S. and around the world. With that rapidly closing window in mind, we **offer Congress and the Administration:**

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- 1. Support climate legislation that protects frontline communities:** Low-income and marginalized communities feel the impacts of the climate crisis first and worst, and are also at higher risk of exposure to toxic substances and the diseases they cause. Legislation such as the **Environmental Justice for All Act** aims to tackle some of the most pressing environmental injustices.
- 2. Center children in all efforts to stem climate change:** Congress must support legislation that specifically protects children and women, who endure the largest costs of climate disruption and have been left behind by current environmental protection practices. Various pieces of legislation, such as the **Women and Climate Change Act of 2021**, would direct federal agencies to develop coordinated and comprehensive strategies to mitigate the impact on these groups.
- 3. Give children air and water that is free from harmful toxins, especially in schools and homes:** Congress must strengthen the **Toxic Substances Control Act** and enact other legislation that protects children from exposure to chemicals, pesticides and pollutants. Our leaders also must commit to **replacing lead water pipes** in schools and American homes, as recommended by various pieces of legislation, to **improving air quality** in the nation's school buildings, and **generally upgrading infrastructure to provide healthy, safe spaces for learning**.



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