

Glossary

Part of the Protecting our Health in a Changing Climate: Health
Needs Assessment (HNA)

Part of the Suffolk Joint Needs Assessment (JSNA)



A collaboration between the Place Making and Knowledge
Intelligence and Evidence teams within the Public Health, Communities and Public Safety directorate.

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This glossary explains key terms as they are used in this Health Needs Assessment. Some terms have a specific meaning in the context of climate and public health, which may differ from their meaning in everyday language.

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Adaptation

Actions that help people and places prepare for and manage the impacts of climate change that are already occurring or unavoidable, such as shading streets, improving insulation, or having plans in place during heatwaves.

Adaptive capacity

The ability of individuals, communities, or systems to anticipate, cope with, respond to, and recover from climate related impacts.

Air pollution

Harmful substances in the air, mainly from traffic, heating and industry, which can damage health, especially the heart and lungs.

Air Quality Management Area

An area declared by a local authority where national air quality objectives for Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) are being exceeded, or are likely to be exceeded, and where action is required to improve air quality.

Climate change / changing climate

Long-term changes in temperature, rainfall and weather patterns. In this HNA, the term is used to describe the changing conditions that can affect health in Suffolk, including heatwaves, flooding, drought, wildfire risk, air quality and other environmental hazards.

Climate risk / climate hazard

A climate related event or trend (such as heatwaves, flooding, or drought) with the potential to cause harm to people, infrastructure, or ecosystems.

Coastal erosion

The loss of land along the coastline due to wave action, rising sea levels, and weather events, increasing flood and displacement risks.

Cumulative impacts

The combined effects of multiple factors experienced at the same time or over time. These effects may be positive or negative. In this Health Needs Assessment, the term is mainly used where multiple risks or disadvantages interact to cause greater harm than any single factor alone.

Direct health impacts

Immediate physical or mental health effects caused directly by exposure to a climate hazard or weather event, such as heatstroke during extreme heat.

Drought

A prolonged period of low rainfall that creates a shortage of water. There is no single definition of drought, and different types may occur separately or together. These include environmental drought, where low water levels harm the natural environment; agricultural drought, where insufficient water affects crops or livestock; water supply drought, where water resources are insufficient to meet

demand; and meteorological drought, where rainfall has been below average in a particular region for a period of time. In England, drought conditions are assessed and declared by the Environment Agency.

Excess deaths / excess mortality

The number of deaths above the number expected during a particular period, based on an established comparison or baseline. This measure can be used to assess the impact of events such as periods of extreme heat.

Exposure

The extent to which people, homes, infrastructure or services are exposed to climate-related hazards, such as flooding, extreme heat or poor air quality.

Extreme weather events

Unusual or severe weather conditions such as heatwaves, floods, storms, droughts, or wildfires.

Fine particles (e.g. PM2.5)

Very small particles in the air that can be breathed deep into the lungs and enter the bloodstream. Long-term exposure increases the risk of heart and lung disease.

Flooding

Where land that is normally dry is temporarily covered by water. Flooding can come from different sources, including rivers (fluvial), surface water (pluvial) following heavy rainfall, groundwater, the sea or tides (tidal or coastal), reservoirs and drainage or sewer systems. More than one type of flooding can occur at the same time.

Flood risk

The likelihood of flooding occurring in an area and the potential consequences for people, property, and health.

Fuel poverty

In this Health Needs Assessment, fuel poverty refers to the [Low Income Low Energy Efficiency \(LILEE\)](#) measure used in England. In England, a household is considered to be in fuel poverty under the LILEE measure if its home has an energy efficiency rating of band D to G, and when they spend the required amount to heat their home, they are left with a residual income below the official poverty line.

Green and blue space

Natural and semi-natural environments such as parks, woodlands, rivers, lakes, and coastal areas that support health and wellbeing.

Ground-level ozone

A harmful air pollutant formed when other pollutants react in sunlight. It can irritate the lungs and worsen respiratory conditions such as asthma.

Heat Health Alerting System

An alert issued by the [UK Health Security Agency](#) in partnership with the Met Office when forecast hot weather could have impacts on health. Alerts are based on the likely level of impact and the likelihood of those impacts occurring.

Heatwave

A period of unusually high temperatures lasting several days. It is defined by the Met Office as a period of at least three consecutive days when temperatures meet or exceed a specific regional threshold, which may be accompanied by high humidity. Heatwaves can lead to serious illness or death, particularly among older people and people with long-term health conditions.

Health inequalities

Unfair and avoidable differences in health between groups of people, often linked to income, housing quality, age, disability or where people live.

Health vulnerability

The likelihood that a person or population will experience adverse health effects from a hazard, shaped by their exposure, sensitivity and ability to prepare, respond and adapt. Some people are more affected by heat or air pollution, including older adults, young children, people with long-term illness, and those living in poorly insulated or overcrowded housing.

Health Needs Assessment (HNA)

A structured assessment that brings together evidence to understand current and future health needs and support local planning and decision making.

Health system

The organisations, people, and actions whose primary aim is to promote, restore, or maintain health, including public health, healthcare, and social care services.

Indirect health impacts

Health effects that occur as a consequence of climate hazards but are mediated through environmental, social, or economic pathways, such as food insecurity, mental health impacts, or disruption to health services.

Mitigation

In climate and public health literature, this term usually refers to actions that reduce the drivers of future climate risk. This HNA focuses primarily on health impacts, preparedness and adaptation.

Nature based solutions

Actions that use natural processes and ecosystems to address climate risks, such as reducing heat, managing flooding, or improving air quality while supporting biodiversity.

Nitrogen dioxide

A gas mainly produced by traffic, especially diesel vehicles. High levels can irritate the lungs and worsen breathing problems such as asthma.

Neighbourhood level data

Small area data used to understand differences between communities and identify where health risks or inequalities may be higher.

Non-communicable disease (NCD)

Long-term health conditions that are not infectious, such as respiratory or cardiovascular disease.

Overheating (of homes)

Indoor temperatures rising to levels that pose a risk to health, often during heatwaves and particularly affecting older or poorly insulated housing.

Public engagement

Processes that involve communities in sharing views, experiences, and concerns to inform evidence, decision making, or policy development.

Resilience

The capacity of individuals, communities, and systems to withstand, adapt to, and recover from extreme weather and other climate-related disruption.

Sensitivity

The degree to which an individual or system is affected by exposure to a climate hazard, influenced by factors such as age, health status, or existing inequalities.

Socioeconomic deprivation

Disadvantage linked to income, employment, housing, education, and access to services, which can increase vulnerability to climate related health impacts.

Urban heat island effect

Built up areas are often warmer than nearby rural areas because buildings, roads and pavements absorb and retain heat, and there is less green space.

Vector borne disease

Illnesses transmitted by insects or animals, such as mosquitoes or ticks, whose distribution may change with climate conditions.

Vulnerability

The degree to which individuals or communities are likely to experience harm from climate hazards, shaped by exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity.