

Federal Health Agencies Unveil National Tool to Measure Health Impacts of Environmental Burdens

New Environmental Justice Index addresses cumulative impacts on health and health equity

Press Release

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Contact: [Media Relations](#)

(404) 639-3286

Atlanta) – Today, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), in partnership with the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Environmental Justice, announce the release of the [Environmental Justice Index \(EJI\)](#). The EJI builds off existing environmental justice indexes to provide a single environmental justice score for local communities across the United States so that public health officials can identify and map areas most at risk for the health impacts of environmental burden.

It is the first national, geographic-driven tool designed to measure the cumulative impacts of environmental burden through the lenses of human health and health equity. Cumulative impacts are the total harm to human health that occurs from the combination of environmental burden such as pollution and poor environmental conditions, pre-existing health conditions, and social factors.

An example of how pre-existing health conditions can be worsened by environmental burden would be two people with asthma. One person lives in a community with elevated air pollution, and the other person does not. While both people have asthma, the person living in the community with elevated air pollution may be more likely to be hospitalized based on having both factors.

"Too many communities across our nation, particularly low-income communities and communities of color, continue to bear the brunt of pollution. Meeting the needs of these communities requires our focused attention and we will use the Environmental Justice Index to do just that," said Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra.

"Addressing environmental injustice is critical to advancing health equity," said CDC Director Rochelle P. Walensky, MD, MPH. "While everyone is at some risk from the health impacts of environmental hazards, the communities that are most affected are often those that are already experiencing health inequities. CDC is taking action to address the adverse health effects associated with environmental injustice by identifying those most at risk with tools like the Environmental Justice Index."

"Everyone deserves to live, learn, and work in a healthy environment, and this new tool builds on existing environmental screening tools," said Patrick Breyse, PHD, CIH, Director of ATSDR and CDC's National Center for Environmental Health. "The Environmental Justice Index strengthens the scientific evidence on the cumulative health impacts of environmental burden on communities across the country."

The EJI was created to help public health officials and communities identify and map communities most at risk for facing the health impacts of environmental hazards. Social factors, such as poverty, race, and ethnicity, along with pre-existing health conditions, may increase these impacts.

"Communities are at the heart and center of HHS' environmental justice work. This tool will serve as a resource for communities and public health officials to identify and prioritize over-burdened communities so we can work together to provide solutions to the problems they may be facing," said HHS Assistant Secretary for Health ADM Rachel Levine, who oversees the Office of Environmental Justice at the Department.

The EJI can help public health officials, policymakers, and communities identify and respond to the unique environmental and social factors that affect a community's health and well-being.

Specifically, the EJI databases and maps can be used to:

- identify areas that may require special attention or additional resources to improve health and health equity,
- educate and inform the public about their community,
- analyze the unique, local factors driving cumulative impacts on health to inform policy and decision-making, and
- establish meaningful goals and measure progress towards environmental justice and health equity.

Environmental injustice can have profound negative effects on human health and well-being. Addressing these negative effects is a key part of promoting health equity.

Through this EJI index, HHS is continuing to advance the Biden-Harris Administration's environmental justice goals. The EJI complements the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST), which is a geospatial mapping tool that the White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) is developing to identify disadvantaged communities that are marginalized, underserved, and overburdened by pollution. CEQ released a beta version of the CEJST in February to receive feedback from the public, Tribal Nations, and Federal agencies, and anticipates releasing version 1.0 later this year. Federal agencies will use the CEJST to help identify disadvantaged communities that will benefit from [covered programs](#) through the [Justice40 Initiative](#), which aims to deliver 40% of the overall benefits of climate, clean energy, affordable and sustainable housing, clean water, and other investments to disadvantaged communities. As part of these efforts, the Department of Health and Human Services [announced](#) 13 of its programs are included in Justice40 Initiative to help communities find relief from pollution and climate-related events impacting people's health.

Background

The EJI presents data for each census tract in the United States. The data used in the tool comes from the U.S. Census Bureau, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In addition to delivering a single environmental justice score for each community, the EJI also scores communities on each of the three modules in the tool (social vulnerability, environmental burden, health vulnerability) and allows more detailed analysis within these modules.

For more information about the EJI, visit: <https://eji.cdc.gov>.

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