



Association pour la santé environnementale du Québec  
Environmental Health Association of Québec

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### Youth and Climate Action

Young people across the globe have taken a stand on climate change: they refuse to accept the climate denial or the lack of action to address the crisis. There is no more time for waiting, the world must act now.

#### **How will climate change affect youth, in the present and future?**

According to the 2010 United Nations Joint Framework Initiative on Children, Youth and Climate Change, climate change represents a serious threat to the health and socio-economic stability of youth, especially in developing countries, where 80 percent (over a billion) of young people live.

Extreme weather events climate scientists warned of have become a reality. The Australian and Californian wildfires this year are an example of this; the increased temperatures make the air and plants drier, thus more susceptible to spread fire. These horrific blazes have had profound physical impacts, killing and injuring some people, but also psychological trauma on those forced to flee. This includes many young people, who have had their education and lives incredibly disrupted.

The melting of the ice sheets and alpine glaciers will have an immense impact on the Arctic ecosystems, and the peoples living in them, which includes many young people.

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There are many future consequences on health linked to rising temperature, through increased disease, freshwater shortages, worsened smog, etc.

### **How are they fighting back against it?**

The 17-year-old Greta Thunberg has become the face of youth climate activism. In 2018, she began skipping classes on Friday as a protest, holding a sign that read "School Strike for Climate" and urging students globally to join her. Ultimately, she conveyed the message that there was little point in studying for a future that may not even exist. Her protests went viral on social media and other strikes started around the world, with the hashtag #FridaysForFuture. Soon enough, Thunberg was urging immediate action from businesses at the World Economic Forum and speaking to the UN's Secretary General and others at the global climate summit in Poland. Her powerful words resonated with youth across the world: "***How dare you? You have stolen my dreams and my childhood with your empty words.***" In September 2019, she joined the Montreal climate strike, along with half a million people. This protest, the largest in our province's history, was composed of mainly students. In fact, many schools closed down to allow the students to demonstrate.

Young people have also formed various grassroots groups to educate and act on the issue. For example, the Sunrise Movement, an American youth-led organization, has worked to help elect politicians that were proponents of renewable energy by creating sit-in protests, campaigning, etc. In Canada, the Youth Climate Lab is devoted to creating projects that advance climate action. They ran a number of events at the 2019 UN Climate Conference (COP25), including discussions between youth and business leaders, and a youth and climate finance event. Also, the documentary *Happening to Us*, shown at COP25 was created by youth from Tuktoyaktuk in Canada. It depicted coastal erosion in northern Canada and the impacts of sea-level rise on the communities. As ice is shrinking at the alarming rate of 13.1 percent a decade, the northern communities are among those of the most affected by climate change.



## **How can we, on a smaller individual scale, fight against it?**

### ***Change the way you move around:***

Driving less is an effective way to reduce your carbon footprint. According to a 2017 study, not using a car for a year could save about 2.6 tons of carbon dioxide. There are many alternatives, including public transport, carpooling, walking, and biking. Of course, it is unrealistic to expect everyone to give up driving. It is therefore important to have good practices: maintaining the vehicle up to proper standards, driving efficiently (going easy on the gas and brakes), and avoiding excess weight in the car.

### ***Eat better:***

Cutting down on meat is a good choice for the environment. The production of red meat requires a lot of feed, water and land, and the livestock themselves also give off methane, a harmful greenhouse gas. (Beef gives off more than six pounds of carbon dioxide per serving while the amount created per serving by rice, legumes, carrots, apples or potatoes is less than half a pound.)

### ***Shop more responsibly:***

Simply buying less, choosing second-hand, avoiding excess packaging, investing in longer-lasting items, and bringing a reusable bag to the store are just a few of the ways to reduce waste. Clothing, in particular, has a huge environmental cost, given that fast fashion, an enduring trend, is produced quickly, cheaply and unsustainably.

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