Climate Change and Ozone Depletion, Early Effects on our Health in Europe.

Edited by S. Kovats, B. Menne, A. McMichael, R. Bertollini and C. Soskolne.
Publisher: WHO Regional Publication, 116 pages, Price: 35 S Fr.

IMAJ 2001;3:467

Climate change and stratospheric ozone depletion are anticipated to have a range of health effects. Some will be direct effects, such as deaths related to heat waves and skin cancer induced by ultraviolet radiation. Others will result from disturbances to complex physical and ecological processes, such as changes in patterns of infectious disease, drinking-water supplies and agricultural yields. Some health effects may become evident by the year 2010; others will take longer. Furthermore, failure to reduce fossil fuel combustion, the principal means of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, will result directly in a continuing (and increasing) avoidable burden of mortality and disease from exposure to local air pollution.

This book is actually a report that reviews the scientific evidence and policy implications for the potential effects of climate change on human health. The introduction describes the initiatives carried out on climate change and human health at both the global and European levels. The first chapter gives an overview of climate change and scenarios for Europe in the twenty-first century. The second chapter addresses the health effects of climate change, with particular attention to potential effects on thermal stress and vector-borne diseases. The third chapter reviews the health effects of stratospheric ozone depletion, particularly the effects of ultraviolet radiation on the immune system. Climate change may already be affecting human health, and a chapter on the early health effects of climate change is therefore included (early effects in this context are defined as effects anticipated within the next 10–30 years).

The final chapters describe the actions required to reduce the health effects of climate change. These include policies to reduce climate change (mitigation) as well as preventive action to reduce the potential health effects of climate change (adaptation).

Eitan Israeli PhD
Israel Institute for Biological Research
Ness-Ziona, Israel