

COOS
Health and
Wellness

Public Health Division

March 2024

Natural Disaster &
Health Assessment:
Executive summary

Introduction + Methods

Under the direction of Coos Health and Wellness, Public Health Division (CHWPHD), Rede Group (hereafter Rede) conducted a natural disaster and health resiliency assessment and developed recommendations informed and reviewed by CHWPHD leadership. Rede conducted the assessment from September 2023 to February 2024 using a mixed methods approach that included a survey administered to CHWPHD, 16 interviews with community and governmental partners, and the review of six secondary data sources.

Key Findings

Natural Disasters + Health Impacts

Across data sources, the natural disasters that were most likely to become more frequent and severe included:

- **Extreme Heat:** Secondary data showed high confidence that Coos County will experience more extreme heat/heat waves in the coming decades.
- **Wildfires:** Secondary data and interviewees highlighted increased wildfires as a concern for Coos County. Interviewees also highlighted health impacts of smoke and limited evacuation routes in their area.
- **Storms, Floods, and Landslides:** Secondary data showed that these natural disasters are expected to get worse and happen more frequently.
- **Earthquakes and Tsunamis:** As a coastal community, Coos County has a high risk of experiencing an earthquake and/or tsunami. Interviewees were worried about “The Big One” (Cascadia earthquake) and secondary data showed that a major earthquake and/or tsunami would devastate much of the county.



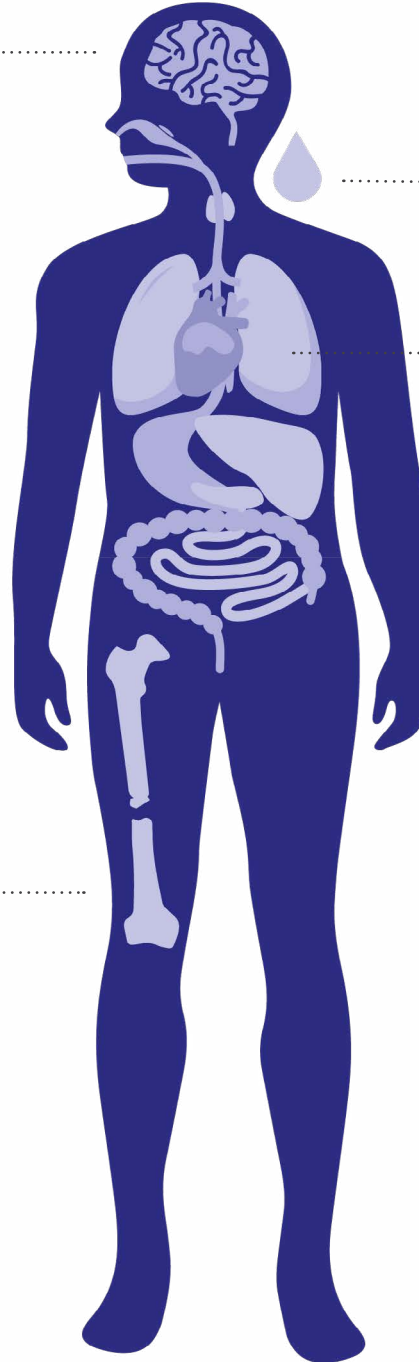
Mental health impacts:

Any natural disaster has the potential to disrupt social networks and induce or worsen mental health conditions, such as anxiety, depression, and loneliness. Data from the assessment showed a shortage of available mental health services in the county. This may hinder community members' access to the mental health support they need to cope with and recover from a natural disaster.



Physical injury:

Storms, floods, landslides, tsunamis, and earthquakes, which are all likely to persist or increase in Coos County, have potential to cause severe structural damage, and therefore the risk of physical injury is also high.



Heat related illness:

Community members in Coos County are under-prepared to deal with the effects of extreme heat due to a historically temperate climate. Outdoor workers, older adults, pregnant women, and young children are especially at risk.



Respiratory illness/allergies:

The assessment revealed that as temperatures rise, Coos County can expect increased pollen levels and more wildfire smoke, both of which can trigger or worsen respiratory conditions. Outdoor workers, particularly those in forestry and agriculture, face heightened risks.



Extreme Heat



Wildfires



Storms, Flood, and Landslides



Earthquakes and Tsunamis

Strengths + Sources of Resilience

The People of Coos County: Interviewees and findings from the CHA highlighted the people of Coos County as a strength, noting a lot of social connectedness in the community (including membership to faith-based groups) and a general sense that people depend on their neighbors in times of need.

Current Emergency Preparedness/Response Efforts: Some interviewees noted the county's current response efforts as a strength in their community. Additionally, in the all-hazards community survey, many respondents said that they have taken some steps to prepare themselves and/or their home.

Populations to Prioritize

Some populations are more exposed to natural disasters and/or more vulnerable to experiencing health impacts than others. Efforts to build community resilience to natural disasters should prioritize these groups:

- Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)
- Older adults and people with disabilities
- Outdoor workers
- People living in isolated areas of the county (e.g., Allegany, Powers)
- People with limited English proficiency
- People with lower incomes
- Pregnant people
- Unhoused populations

Recommendations + Potential Strategies

Prioritize Vulnerable Population Groups/Areas

01

- Align preparedness, response, and recovery efforts with health equity goals and community needs, ensuring vulnerable populations are prioritized.
- Utilize secondary data sources in this report, along with community feedback, to identify communities and geographical areas with the greatest need for support.
- Develop and disseminate tailored communications about natural disaster planning and response to vulnerable populations.

Engage the Community

02

- Listen to what community members need in order to increase their resilience; encouraging discussion with and among community members.
- Make preparedness actions clear and remove as many barriers as possible. Make efforts to connect community members to free or low-cost supplies.
- Meet people where they are; disseminating messaging and/or hosting events at schools, churches, senior centers, and other community hubs.

Expand Partnerships and Clarify Roles

03

- Engage CBOs in efforts to help community members prepare for natural disasters, and to reach vulnerable populations in response and recovery.
- Collaborate with emergency management partners to develop communications and clarify roles for CHWPHD.
- Continue sharing plans and available resources with community-based and governmental partners. Ask partners what support CHWPHD could provide to increase community natural disaster preparedness.