

Supreme Court curbs EPA's ability to cut greenhouse-gas emissions

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What's the news: In the third major high-court decision in the last two weeks to deal a blow to public health, a 6–3 U.S. Supreme Court majority (PDF) restricted the ability of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to effectively regulate the greenhouse-gas emissions that cause climate change and have been proven to harm the public health.

“Regulating and reducing greenhouse-gas emissions is critical for combating the climate crisis and its major health implications, impacting the respiratory, cardiovascular and immune systems of the U.S. population,” said AMA President Jack Resneck Jr., MD, who noted climate change’s inequitable impact.

“The AMA has declared climate change a public health crisis that threatens the health and well-being of all people and supports policies that reduce U.S. greenhouse-gas emissions aimed at carbon neutrality by 2050,” added Dr. Resneck, professor and vice chair of the University of California, San Francisco, School of Medicine’s dermatology department.

“As physicians and leaders in medicine, we recognize the urgency of supporting environmental sustainability efforts to help halt global climate change and the devastating health harms that it is sure to bring,” he said. “Despite this ruling, we will continue to do our part to protect public health and improve health outcomes for our patients across the nation.”

The 6–3 decision follows the Supreme Court’s egregious ruling last week overturning *Roe v. Wade* and a decision that struck down New York’s reasonable concealed-carry firearms law.

Why it's important: “Higher temperatures and punishing heat waves that contribute to illness and injury are two prominent effects of climate change that harm public health,” said a friend-of-the-court brief (PDF) filed by the AMA, the American Thoracic Society and more than 15 other leading medical organizations and dozens of U.S. public health leaders in the case, *West Virginia v. Environmental*

Protection Agency.

“America's leading physician-member medical organizations and public health experts submit this brief to draw the court's attention to the exigent health threats from climate change. Driven by fossil fuel emissions, climate pollutants harm public health across every segment of American society and in every state,” the brief said. “The consequences of climate change impair pulmonary, cardiovascular, neurological, immunological, behavioral health, and other vital systems and functions.”

Learn more: Among the organizations that joined the AMA and the American Thoracic Society in filing the brief were the American Academy of Pediatrics, American College of Physicians, and the American College of Environmental and Occupational Medicine. The American Thoracic Society offers patient educational materials detailing the health effects of climate change.

Also, discover why physicians see climate change as a health emergency and have demanded action such as rejoining the Paris Climate Agreement.

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