

Announcer:

Earlier this year, Dr. Nirav Shah, former director of the Maine CDC and principal deputy director at the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, spoke to us about the intersection of climate change and public health.

While speaking with sustainable healthcare host Tim Doak, Shah also discussed the perception that Maine is more resistant to climate change, and whether that perception is based in reality.

Tim Doak:

Talking about Maine in particular, I think that those of us that live here might think we're more immune to climate change than certainly other parts of the country. Do you agree that that's the normal mindset here, and should we be thinking differently?

Nirav Shah:

The answer is that we should be thinking differently. It's been my impression that folks have felt that climate change is something that will affect other parts of the country, say the Deep South, because it's just naturally hotter there, and that Maine's got a little bit more time. I think the floods of recent memory should serve as a wake-up call that that notion, that safety blanket is not necessarily the case. I mean, now is the time to act.

While there are already parts of the country that are more significantly affected by climate change; again, I'm thinking of the Deep South, et cetera; Maine again has not been uniformly spared. We've already talked about the floods. But there is the possibility in the not-too-distant future that things that haven't historically affected us. For example, wildfires may start to do so, to say nothing of some of the infectious disease threats that I mentioned.

And so the answer is, "Yes." Maine needs to continue preparing for this as a health matter, as an infrastructure matter, and as an overall resilience matter.

Again, I want to take a second to acknowledge that there already has been a tremendous amount of work done by the State of Maine and under the leadership of Governor Mills. Now we have an opportunity to continue that before disaster strikes.

The reason that's hard is climate change will affect us in ways that we have already discussed on this podcast. But it will also affect us in ways that we haven't yet considered or taken the time to appreciate.

And the hardest risks to prepare for are those that you don't think can ever come your way. Whether it's wildfires or an unknown unknown, those are almost by definition the hardest things to prepare for, which means that we've got to be in contact with other communities across the state, across the country, across the globe to understand what risks they're starting to see, and be imaginative about what might come here.

Announcer:

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