What is climate change?
In the last two centuries, humans have caused average temperatures on Earth to rise about 1º C (1.8º F) – enough to affect our planet’s delicate ecosystems. Scientists warn that if the climate continues to warm too much and too quickly, it could have dire consequences for much of life on Earth.

What is causing climate change?
The major cause of the current rise in global temperatures is human activity. Most factories, vehicles, and cities are powered by fossil fuels, including coal, petroleum, and natural gas. When these fossil fuels are used for energy, they release carbon gases, such as carbon dioxide and methane, into the atmosphere. Greenhouse gases transmit sunlight to the earth’s surface and then trap some of the sun’s heat in the atmosphere, warming our planet. An excess of greenhouse gases traps too much heat and leads to harmful levels of warming.

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How will rising temperatures affect life on Earth?

Climate change is already affecting life on our planet. Our oceans have become warmer and more acidic. As the ice caps at the North and South poles melt, they are causing sea levels to rise. All over the globe, flowers and trees are budding earlier, and butterflies and birds are shifting their ranges because of rising temperatures. A warming planet also causes weather to become more extreme. Scientists predict that climate change will bring more heat waves, droughts, floods, and wildfires to places where humans live. Climate change will also affect our food supply as crops, pests, and pollinators respond to rising temperatures. Global inequality puts the most vulnerable people – such as low-income communities and people of color – at the highest risk of suffering from a changing climate.

What can we do to take action?

One of the most important ways we can make an impact on climate change at home and in our communities is to create fewer greenhouse gases. This means lowering our energy use overall by driving less, eating more plants and less meat, conserving water, and making our homes more energy efficient. Producing new things requires energy, so we can buy less new stuff and reuse and recycle our old stuff. We can talk about climate change with our friends and neighbors and make sure they know where to find reliable sources of science-based information. We can hold companies accountable. We can tell our leaders in local, state, and national governments that we expect them to take the health of our planet seriously. Climate change is the biggest challenge we face today. But when one person, another person, and another person come together, we can do the work required to change our planet for the better.