

How the drought is hurting health

By Deborah Schoch, Center for Health Reporting

Four years of drought in California is wearing on the bodies and minds of the people who live in the San Joaquin Valley.

State health officials say they have not seen anything to link the drought to changes in residents' health. But local doctors and health experts, and a drive south on Highway 99 from Sacramento to Tulare County, tell a different story.

Physicians say they've treated more children and adults struggling to breathe as dust from plowed-over farm fields and wildfires penetrates nostrils and lungs. Mental health counselors report that they're hearing from more residents suffering anxiety and depression, fearing that the drought will cost them their homes, farms and livelihoods. Calls are up sharply at a local suicide prevention hotline.

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