

CLIMATE CHANGE AND HEALTH

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO)

"Climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time. Climate change will affect, in profoundly adverse ways, some of the most fundamental determinants of health: food, air, water.

In the face of this challenge, WHO is committed to do everything it can to ensure all is done to protect human health from climate change"

**Margaret Chan, WHO – Director-General
(07/04/2008)**



CLIMATE CHANGE, THE GLOBAL HEALTH COMMUNITY, AND WHO

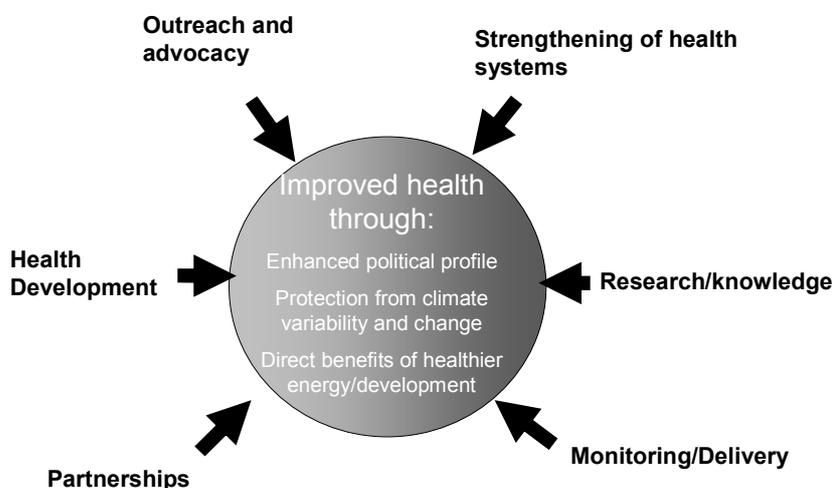
The effects of climate change on health are receiving increasing attention as a central concern for policy makers and the public. Human beings are already exposed to short and long term health risks of climate variability and change. Climate-sensitive diseases and health conditions today kill millions. They include malnutrition, which causes over 3.5 million deaths per year, diarrhoeal diseases, which kill over 1.8 million, and malaria, which kills almost 1 million. Climate change threatens to increase these disease burdens and erode the environmental conditions that support good health and well-being of mankind.

The health sector is increasingly taking responsibility for protecting and promoting health in response to this challenge. The global health agenda is set by the annual **World Health Assembly (WHA)**, comprising the 193 WHO Member States. In May 2008, the WHA passed a resolution on climate change and health, drawing attention to the threat posed by climate change to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and health equity. The resolution calls on WHO to strengthen its work in raising awareness about the health implications of climate change, support capacity building and research in health protection from climate change in countries, and urge action by the health sector. This resolution is a political milestone for the full involvement of the health community in the climate change agenda and drew overwhelming support from the Assembly.

Commitments by WHO

In compliance with this mandate from the health community, WHO is committed to strengthening (1) its scientific, normative and policy development functions, (2) its operational programmes (e.g. combating infectious disease, improving water and sanitation services and hygiene practices, and providing health support in emergencies), and (3) its support to Ministries of Health and other health actors throughout the world.

WHO support on public health and climate



WHO pledges to carry out the following specific actions, to be reported both to the 124th session of the WHO Executive Board in January 2009, and to the climate change community through upcoming Conferences of the Parties (COP) to the UNFCCC.

Strengthening of health systems WHO emphasizes the need to strengthen health systems to enable countries to deal with both gradual changes and sudden shocks. Further investment to strengthen key functions, and forward planning to address the new challenges posed by climate change, are urgently needed. This approach will require strengthening specific public health interventions within the formal health sector, such as control of neglected tropical diseases and actions to improve the environmental and social determinants of health, from provision of clean water and sanitation, to enhancing the welfare of women. A particular role encompasses decisively ensuring the effective provision of primary health care. Overall, a common theme must be ensuring health equity and giving priority to protecting the health security of particularly vulnerable groups.

Outreach and advocacy WHO will work towards greater awareness of the health implications of climate change amongst policy-makers and the general public. This will include providing fora for dedicated awareness-raising activities, such as the 2008 World Health Day (WHD) campaign on "Health Protection from Climate Change" WHO will continue to draw the attention of the public and policy-makers to the serious health risks presented by climate change, to global health and to the achievement of the health-related Millennium Development Goals through reports, presentations, and participation in international climate change meetings and processes. Improved awareness will help health-sector professionals to show leadership in supporting rapid and comprehensive strategies for mitigation (reduction of climate change), and adaptation (coping better with climate change), that will both improve health now and reduce vulnerability in the future. Improved awareness will be paramount towards

empowering local communities to become climate resilient by better protecting their health from climate sensitive diseases and from extreme weather events.

Monitoring, surveillance and forecasting These systems require further improvements and stronger basic health services, will improve health now, and reduce vulnerability to climate change in the future. WHO is defining a set of indicators for the monitoring of vulnerability to climate change and encourages Member States to strengthen the capacity of their health systems for monitoring and minimizing the public health impacts of climate change through adequate preventive measures, preparedness, timely response and effective management of natural disasters.

Health development With the support of donor countries, WHO is developing tools and methods to facilitate better estimate of the scale and nature of health problems associated with climate change in vulnerable regions and to identify strategies and best practice for implementing and strengthening effective preventive and adaptive interventions. By end 2008, WHO will consult with Member States on scaling up WHO's technical support for assessing and addressing the implications of climate change for health and health systems.

Research and knowledge WHO will continue to support national and regional assessments, burden of disease studies, identification of adaptation strategies for the health sector, dissemination of current scientific findings, guidelines and training materials, research and reviews on early warning systems. WHO will also promote interdisciplinary research, through the network of WHO Collaborating Centres in leading academic institutions. By end 2008, WHO will lead the definition of a global research agenda on climate change and health, by convening a consultation process and international meeting that brings together end users from the health community, researchers, research funders, and other UN agencies.

Partnerships WHO will strengthen its close cooperation with countries and agencies inside and outside of the UN system, and in particular with governments and representatives of civil society to develop capacity to assess and response to health risks from climate change. The WHO regional and country offices provide close relationships to the health sector within Member States, who are the primary defence against health impacts from climate change and variability. WHO has long-standing collaborations with health research organizations, and with the United Nations (e.g. FAO, WMO, UNDP, UNEP) and other international and national agencies, that are involved in mitigating and adapting to climate change. Specifically, WHO is committed to engage actively in the United Nations Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Nairobi Work Programme (NWP) on Impacts, Vulnerability and Adaptation to climate change, in order to ensure its relevance to the health sector, and to keep Member States informed about the work programme in order to facilitate their participation in it as appropriate and access to the benefits of its outputs.

Beyond adaptation measures WHO and the health community is helping to define the health implications of many of the actions in other sectors needed to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and stabilize climate change. For example, shifting from inefficient and polluting burning of charcoal and biomass to cleaner burning fuels or renewables not only reduces deforestation and carbon dioxide emissions, but can also reduce the 1.5 million annual deaths from indoor air pollution. Reducing reliance on

cars and improving access to safe public transport, walking and cycling could improve outdoor air quality (reducing the 800,000 annual deaths from air pollution), increase physical activity (reducing obesity, heart disease and cancer), and reduce the 1.2 million annual traffic-related injuries and deaths. Where they have been quantified and compared, the health "co-benefits" of such decisions are usually found to be larger than the environmental implications themselves. They are therefore a potentially important argument in favour of clean development and greenhouse gas mitigation. A clarification of the health implications of mitigation and adaptation decisions in these sectors and the development of tools for their evaluation at national and local level will support achievement of these health "co-benefits", and avoidance of health risks. This will in turn enhance population acceptability and produce net economic benefits.

MORE INFORMATION:

Director General's statement on World Health Day 2008

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/statements/2008/s05/en/index.html>

World Health Assembly Resolution on climate change and health

http://www.who.int/globalchange/climate/EB_Chealth_resolution/en/index.html

World Health Day 2008 on protecting health from climate change

<http://www.who.int/world-health-day/en/index.html>

LINK TO WHO'S REGIONAL OFFICES & HEADQUARTERS

WHO Regional Office for Africa (AFRO)

<http://afro.who.int/index.html>

WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean (EMRO)

<http://www.emro.who.int/ceha/index.asp>

WHO Regional Office for Europe (EURO)

<http://www.euro.who.int/globalchange>

WHO Headquarters

<http://www.who.int/globalchange/en/>

WHO Regional Office for the Americas/Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)

<http://www.paho.org/>

WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia (SEARO)

<http://www.searo.who.int/>

WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific (WPRO)

<http://www.wpro.who.int/sites/climate/home.htm>