

Mitigating the resurgence of infectious diseases due to global warming

Background

Climate change poses a significant threat to human health by impacting the environment, natural and human systems, and social and economic conditions. It acts as a “threat multiplier”, jeopardizing decades of health progress. The changing climate leads to more frequent and severe weather events such as storms, extreme heat, floods, droughts, and wildfires, directly and indirectly contributing to health risks, including increased mortality, noncommunicable diseases, infectious diseases, and health emergencies.

The effects of climate change extend to the health workforce and infrastructure, diminishing the capacity to provide universal health coverage (UHC). Moreover, climate-related shocks and stresses, such as altered temperature and precipitation patterns, droughts, floods, and rising sea levels, degrade the environmental and social determinants of physical and mental health. Every aspect of health, from clean air, water, and soil to food systems and livelihoods, is impacted by climate change.

Failure to promptly address climate change will heighten health risks, reverse global health improvements, and violate collective commitments to ensure the universal human right to health for all. Taking action is imperative to safeguard public health and uphold our shared responsibility for a sustainable and healthy future.

UN involvement

WHO, as a specialized agency of the United Nations, actively addresses the profound threats that climate change poses to global health. By conducting comprehensive research and assessments.

WHO examines the direct and indirect health impacts of climate change, ranging from the spread of infectious diseases to changes in air quality and extreme weather events. The organization provides crucial guidance to member states on adapting health systems to climate challenges, including strategies for managing climate-sensitive diseases and enhancing surveillance systems.

Through policy advocacy, WHO emphasizes the integration of health considerations into national and international climate policies, participating in global climate negotiations. The Climate and Health Initiative, a dedicated WHO effort, supports countries in developing and implementing policies to enhance health resilience amid climate change.

The organization also contributes to global platforms fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange while monitoring and reporting on the evolving health risks associated with climate change worldwide.

Useful links

WHO's website has a dedicated section on climate change and health, offering reports, guidelines, and updates on global initiatives.

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health#:~:text=Climate%20change%20affects%20food%20availability,700%2000%20annually%2C%20may%20rise.>

IPCC produces comprehensive reports on climate change, including assessments of impacts on health.

<https://www.ipcc.ch/2022/02/28/pr-wgii-ar6/>

CAHA is an alliance of organizations in Australia advocating for action on climate change and health.

<https://climateandhealthalliance.org/about/>

The Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change provides an annual assessment of the health effects of climate change and the progress being made to address these challenges.

<https://www.thelancet.com/countdown-health-climate>

Questions to consider

How does climate change affect physical and mental health of the citizens of my country?

What adaptation strategies can be implemented in my country to minimize health risks in the face of changing climate patterns?

How does climate change intersect with human rights, particularly the right to health in my country?

Is my country actively trying to resolve this issue?

How does my country use educational initiatives to raise awareness among the public and policymakers about the relationship between climate change and infectious diseases?

Sources

WHO/Climate change

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health#:~:text=Climate%20change%20affects%20food%20availability,700%2000%20annually%2C%20may%20rise.>

United Nations

<https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/health-and-climate-change>

GCHA

<https://climateandhealthalliance.org/about/>

IPCC

<https://www.ipcc.ch/2022/02/28/pr-wgii-ar6/>

The Lancet

<https://www.thelancet.com/countdown-health-climate>