

We Must Fight One of the World's Biggest Health Threats: Climate Change



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In the face of one of the greatest health threats for humanity, the urgent need to implement measures addressing climate change remains a compelling, yet unrealized goal.

Climate change is happening now and its impacts are being felt around the globe. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that a staggering [one in four deaths](#) can be attributed to preventable environmental causes and climate change is exacerbating these risks.

Climate change poses a multitude of complex health challenges, from extreme weather events to the spread of infectious diseases and the exacerbation of chronic conditions. It cannot be prevented with a vaccine, or treated with an antibiotic. But we know that we can mitigate its impacts.

Reducing emissions across all sectors is critical to contain climate change and keep [1.5C within reach](#). To do this, the world must decarbonize its energy systems and reduce emissions by at least [43 per cent](#) over the next seven years.

If we don't act, climate change will soon overwhelm the world's [health systems](#). Extreme weather events – like droughts, floods and heatwaves – will increase in frequency and severity as the planet warms. Last year's floods in Pakistan, for example, displaced [eight million people and affected 33 million overall](#).

We know that worse is to come. Without bold and urgent action, climate change will [displace around 216 million people by 2050](#), the World Bank estimates. Climate change is endangering lives and livelihoods as global food systems struggle to feed a growing world and water sources are compromised. And climate change is triggering a surge in infectious diseases like dengue and cholera which endanger millions.

Measures to reduce emissions can produce major health benefits, including lessening air pollution, which kills seven million people every year.

The connection between health and climate change is obvious. Now the international community must accelerate the energy transition away from fossil fuels and simultaneously build resilience.

What the global community must understand is that investing in climate resilience at a local level pays dividends. The World Bank estimates that [every dollar spent on building climate resilience will bring an average return of US\\$4](#), as better-quality health and wider infrastructure benefit communities and have lasting impacts over multiple sectors.

Most importantly, there is a staggering toll if we do *not* act. Climate change is already affecting almost half the world's population. By 2050 with [a 2C warming scenario](#), a terrifying 1.4 billion more people will be exposed to heat stress, the majority to the most severe forms.

Health must be central to a just climate agenda because those least able to bear the impacts of climate change are also set to suffer the most. Already, the impacts of climate change are being felt disproportionately by low and middle-income countries, even though they are responsible for only a very small share of global emissions.

These disparities will only worsen. According to the World Bank, almost 40 percent of climate-related poverty will result from direct health impacts as people lose their livelihoods or see medical expenses soar.

This future cannot be our reality. That's why we are calling on governments and key stakeholders around the world to come to COP28 with ambitious solutions that prevent these health outcomes – and help those already affected.

As the world's response to COVID-19 has shown us, in the face of great health threats, humanity can come together and tackle the most dramatic challenges – if we unite, act and deliver. Never has this been more important.

This year's UN climate conference will host the [first-ever dedicated Health Day](#) on 3 December and will launch a critical call to action beginning with two key pillars.

The day will host the first Climate Health Ministerial. We have worked closely with a number of nations as country champions – including Brazil, Malawi, the UK, the US, the Netherlands, Kenya, Fiji, India, Egypt, Sierra Leone, and Germany – to develop a Declaration on Climate and Health, which we launch during the recent World Health Summit. This Declaration on Climate and Health will make health an anchor of the climate agenda and a key part of COP28's legacy.

We are calling on all governments to sign up to our Declaration, because we know that together we can deliver public health systems that are climate resilient, climate neutral, sustainable and equitable and which benefit us all.

Second, financing will be a key catalyst on the COP28 Health Day. We want to increase not only the overall amount of climate financing, but to leverage investments devoted to and supporting health. Today, just [two percent](#) of adaptation funding and [0.5 percent of multilateral climate funding](#) go to health.

At COP28, we can help transform the entire climate finance infrastructure for impact. We are calling on international financial institutions and multilateral development banks to increase the flow of concessional funds to the Global South, to lower risk and attract more private capital, while increasing the share that goes to adaptation – and to health.

We are facing an unprecedented crisis. We already have solutions to meet this moment. A health centred climate response is a critical one.

Source: [WHO](#)

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