

WHO statement on Climate Change

- WHO has been producing reports highlighting health risks of a changing climate since 1990. Now we have firmer and wider evidence on the risks of climate change to health, not just heatwaves or malaria, but health risks from water-shortages, melting glaciers, and salination of agricultural and drinking water. We have also shown that the health risks are highly inequitable; climate-related health risks are concentrated on diseases of children, in poor countries.
- We have assembled the evidence of severe health risks. We have worked with WMO and UNEP on raising awareness on these risks for SIDS, mountain regions, and water scarce regions.
- The health impacts require our attention. At an estimated 150,000 deaths per years since 2000, climate change can be said to have claimed the lives of over one million people.
- As the health sector, we now have an obligation to support countries to respond to the risks. We contribute to the UNFCCC adaptation plan of action. We are working with UNDP and with the support of the GEF in a new global project, working directly with operational decision-makers in a range of developing countries across the world.
- At the same time as we see the risks of climate change, we see the opportunities to improve health as countries work to decarbonize their economies. If carefully planned, improved urban planning and better transport policies could cut the 800,000 deaths per year from urban air pollution, 1.2 million from road traffic accidents, 1.9 million from physical inactivity. Individual projects are beginning to highlight some of these potential gains.

- Threats to health are now cited to justify actions to mitigate or adapt to climate change. For all the attention that these issues receive, however, a comprehensive strategy to support a public health response is lacking. To make this truly sustainable, we need to move beyond individual projects to a more systemic approach that ensures that key components of health prevention are strengthened across the board. Within the next year, WHO intends to consult with its partners in the UN system and outside, and prepare a strategy that advises member states on what kinds of interventions need to be strengthened in order to protect health from climate change.
- Climate change demands that we intensify our efforts in preventive public health, and places that crucial task at the core of sustainable development.