

HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS, HEALTHY PEOPLE

PUBLISHED BY THE WHO DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT (PHE)

Worldwide,
13 million deaths
could be prevented
every year by
making our
environments
healthier.

WHO Executive Board agrees on cholera resolution

After considering the report on [cholera: mechanism for control and prevention](#), the WHO Executive Board agreed to recommend the resolution [EB 128.R7](#) to the 64th World Health Assembly. Member States unanimously agreed that cholera needs to be recognized as an increasing threat for many countries and regions. They expressed the urgent need for effective public health interventions, such as proper and timely case management, improved environmental management, adequate use of cholera vaccines, and a solid surveillance system. The interplay between prevention, preparedness and response was also noted. Cholera was recognized as a clear marker of environmental management, as well as an indicator of how we should engage with International Health Regulations and conduct surveillance. It was emphasized that cholera prevention requires access to safe water, adequate sanitation, adequate food safety, appropriate hygiene, and a community-based approach. The board further noted [three progress reports](#): Climate change and health; Improvement of health through sound management of obsolete pesticides and other obsolete chemicals; and Improvement of health through safe and environmentally sound waste management.

The 34-member Board discussed 17 technical and health items, management matters and progress reports.

Environmental and occupational cancer risks

Cancer is the second leading cause of death worldwide. In 2008, there were 7.6 million deaths from cancer as well as 12.7 million new cases. About 19 per cent of all cancers are roughly estimated to be attributable to the environment, contributing to 1.3 million deaths each year. This includes work settings, which means that occupational interventions are vital to reduce cancer incidence.

Decreasing exposure to carcinogens can be cost-effective and contribute to the overall well-being of communities. The first [World Health Organization \(WHO\) international conference on the primary prevention of cancer through environmental and occupational interventions](#) will take place 17-18 March in the towns of Avilés and Gijón, Spain. The conference will strengthen the ability of countries to address determinants of cancers, as well as review key policy options and interventions to reduce environmental and occupational exposures. There will also be a focus on public health approaches, such as those involving civil society. A Call to Action will strengthen the prevention of environmental and occupational cancers within cancer control programmes. First announcements are now available in [English](#), [French](#) and [Spanish](#).

Health in the Green Economy

Many strategies to reduce climate change have large, immediate health benefits, whereas others may pose health risks or trade-offs. When examined systematically, a powerful new dimension of measures to address climate change emerges.

The WHO [Health in the Green Economy](#) series reviews the evidence about expected health impacts of greenhouse gas mitigation strategies, in light of mitigations options for key economic sectors considered in the *Contribution of Working Group III to the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007* (IPCC). The aim of the series is to propose important health co-benefits for sector and health policy-makers, for consideration in the next round of IPCC mitigation reviews (*Working Group III - Fifth Assessment Report*). The policy briefings summarize initial key findings and identify expected health impacts from policies to mitigate climate change in the [housing](#), [transport](#), [household energy](#) and the [health sector](#). [Read full article.](#)



UPCOMING EVENTS 2011

> 4 February

[World Cancer Day](#)

> 16-18 February

[13th REMPAN Coordination and planning meeting, Nagasaki, Japan](#)

> 17-18 March

[WHO international conference on environmental and occupational determinants of cancer. Interventions for primary prevention](#)

> 22 March

[World Water Day](#)

WHO Human Health Risk Assessment Toolkit: Chemical Hazards

The potential public health risks posed by chemicals is well known. Yet the production and use of chemicals continues to increase worldwide, with the global output of chemicals having increased approximately ten-fold between 1970 and 2010.

WHO estimates that more than 25 per cent of the global burden of disease is linked to environmental factors, including exposures to toxic chemicals. For example, exposure to lead accounts for three per cent of the cerebrovascular disease burden and two per cent of the ischaemic heart disease burden. In addition, some nine per cent of the global burden of lung cancer is attributable to occupational exposure to toxic substances. The [WHO Human Health Risk Assessment Toolkit: Chemical Hazards](#) provides guidance to identify, acquire and use the information needed to assess chemical hazards, exposures and the corresponding health risks at local and/or national levels. The toolkit has information about conducting human health risk assessment and identifies information that must be gathered to complete an assessment. It also lists electronic links to international resources to obtain further information about methods essential for conducting the human health risk assessment.

Childhood lead poisoning

Lead poisoning has had devastating consequences for the health of the world's children. It is one of the most common and best-recognized childhood diseases of toxic environmental origin and accounts for about 0.6 per cent of the global burden of disease (WHO, 2009). Around the world today, children are at risk of exposure to lead from multiple sources. Recently, a major occurrence of lead poisoning, related to the processing of lead-rich ore for the extraction of gold, resulted in the deaths of hundreds of young children in northern Nigeria.

Many countries have initiated programmes to lower the level of lead in the environment, but human exposure remains a major concern. The recently released booklet [Childhood Lead Poisoning](#) has been designed to update medical professionals about sources of lead and childhood lead poisoning.

Children's Environmental Health Units

The recently published document, [Children's Environmental Health Units](#), offers an overview of the services that such units can provide to children, parents, the community, health professionals and government officials working to prevent environmentally-related diseases among children. These units advance the ongoing training of health care providers; the ongoing education of the public and other sectors on the protection of children from environmental threats; the management of children with known or suspected exposure to environmental stressors; and the diagnosis, management, and treatment of children with illnesses that are result from environmental stressors.

FACTS AND FIGURES

WHO estimates that more than 25 per cent of the global burden of disease is linked to environmental factors, including toxic chemical exposures.

Lead exposure accounts for three per cent of the cerebrovascular disease burden and two per cent of the ischaemic heart disease burden worldwide.

Some nine per cent of the global burden of lung cancer is attributable to occupational exposure to toxic substances, and five per cent to outdoor air pollution. In some countries, lung cancer and mesothelioma is also caused by exposure to asbestos that is still in use.

Unintentional poisonings kill an estimated 355 000 people each year. Two thirds of these deaths occur in developing countries, where such poisonings are strongly associated with excessive exposure to, and inappropriate use of, toxic chemicals including pesticides.

Source: WHO, *Human Health Risk Assessment Toolkit: Chemical Hazards*

SELECTED HEALTH TOPICS FROM WHO'S PUBLIC HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT WEB SITES

[Chemical safety](#)

[Environmental and occupational determinants of cancer. Interventions for primary prevention](#)

[More public health and environment topics](#)

REGIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT LINKS

[WHO Regional Office for Africa](#)

[WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia](#)

[WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific](#)

[WHO Regional Office for the Americas](#)

[WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean](#)

[WHO Regional Office for Europe](#)

New publications

[WHO Human Health Risk Assessment Toolkit: Chemical Hazards](#)

[Childhood Lead Poisoning](#)

[Children's Environmental Health Units](#)

Spanish version of [WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation](#)

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