

Environmental Conditions Contribute to 12.6 Million Deaths Annually

Nearly 25 percent of annual deaths worldwide are due to unhealthy environmental conditions, according to a World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) report published March 15.

“Findings confirm that 23 percent of global deaths and 26 percent of deaths among children under 5 are due to modifiable environmental factors. Heading this list are stroke, ischemic heart disease, diarrhea and cancers,” WHO stated.

Children under 5 and adults over 50 are the most vulnerable populations globally, and the majority of deaths from unhealthy environments occur in lower-income nations.

Key environmental factors that contribute to these deaths and must be addressed include: potable water access, sanitation systems and hygiene practices, air pollution as well as household practices (such as the type of fuels used for cooking) and workplace conditions.

The impact of climate change on local ecosystems must also be accounted for in policies seeking to reduce deaths resulting from unhealthy living conditions.

“Climate change can affect health in many ways, ranging from heat stroke to increased risks from expanding areas of disease transmission of vector-borne diseases. Also, indirect effects may be considerable, such as malnutrition and reduced access to safe drinking water sources and possibly more wide-ranging effects causing political instability or migration,” WHO noted. “Climate change is therefore a major health challenge and one which is set to increase in the near term.”

In addressing climate change and other modifiable environmental issues that negatively impact health, realistic strategies must be developed and implemented, the report emphasized.

For example, cars cannot be banned, but “clean motor vehicle technologies and alternative modes of transport (rail, bus, cycling and walking)” can be encouraged through government policies and community education.

Global health concerns due to harmful environmental conditions must not be viewed in isolation but must be addressed through “coordinated health, environment and development policies” - a concept that informed the drafting of the [Sustainable Development Goals](#).

For example, poverty reduction initiatives tend to reduce deaths caused by environmental factors; however, development initiatives can bring “modern risks, such as ambient air pollution and unsafe use of chemicals” without effective regulation.

Without a balanced, coordinated approach, similar negative impacts might result from efforts to address global deaths resulting from preventable environmental factors.

The full report is available [here](#).