



**World Health
Organization**



BRIEFING PAPER

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ABOUT THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION:

WHO is a specialised agency of the UN that is concerned with international public health. It was established on 7 April 1948, and is headquartered in Switzerland. The WHO constitution has been signed by 61 countries (all 51 member countries and 10 others). Since its establishment, it has played a leading role in the eradication of smallpox. Its current priorities include communicable diseases, in particular HIV/AIDS, Ebola, malaria and tuberculosis; the mitigation of the effects of non-communicable diseases such as sexual and reproductive health, development, and aging; nutrition, food security and healthy eating, occupational health and substance abuse.

WHO Priority areas

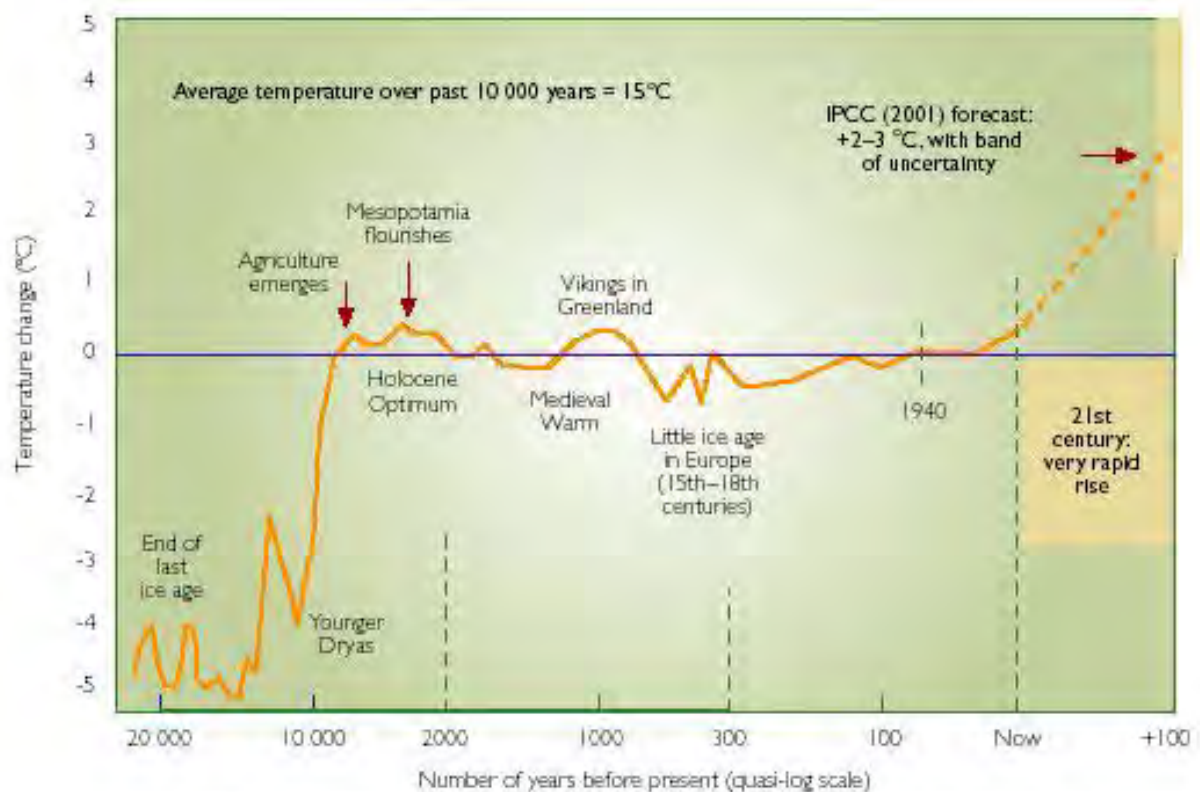
The World Health organization is largely focus on eradicating communicable diseases, non-communicable diseases and improving environmental health, life course and lifestyle, surgery and trauma care, emergency work and health policy across the globe

Challenges

Our increasing understanding of climate change is transforming how we view the boundaries and determinants of human health. Populations of all animal species depend on supplies of food and water, freedom from excess infectious disease, and the physical safety and comfort conferred by climatic stability. The world's climate system is fundamental to this life-support.

Populations of animal species depend on supplies of food and water, freedom from excess infectious disease, and the physical safety and comfort conferred by climatic stability. The world's climate system is fundamental to this life- support. During the twentieth century, world average temperatures increased by approximately 0.6°C, and approximately two thirds of that warming has occurred since 1975. Climatologists forecast further warming, along with changes in precipitation and climatic variability, during the coming century and beyond.





Variations in earth's average surface temperature, over the past 20,000 years

Changing Attitudes over time.

Climate change has entered the mainstream news hugely in the past decade or so, with increasing prominence and regularity. Some sceptics still do not believe in it, saying that global warming can be explained by other, natural factors other than human-led behaviour. However, there has been increasing acceptance and understanding of the fact that carbon emissions, deforestation, cattle farming etc, are all leading to a warmer, more inhospitable climate. Climate activists such as Greta Thunberg and David Attenborough have been largely responsible for increasing public awareness on the topic. As well as this, natural disasters such as the Australian and Californian wildfires, hurricane Irma, and various earthquakes have raised the question of what is to be done to mitigate further environmental damage.



If climate change cannot be overcome, the world as a whole will face serious challenges:

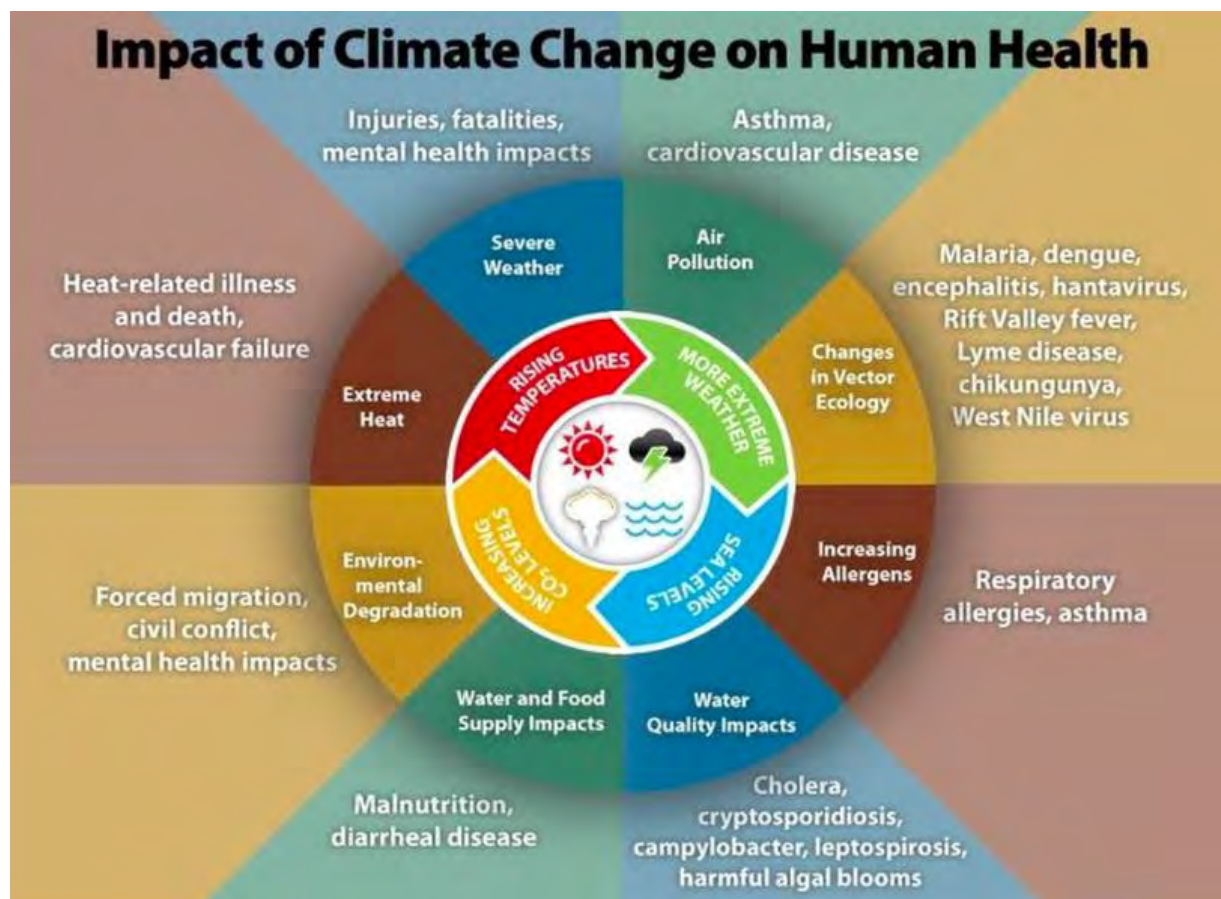
- Increased flooding & natural hazards.
- Sea levels rising, causing coastline inhabitants to lose their homes and businesses.
- Increased risk of wildfires, as seen in Australia and California.
- Shortages of food sources due to droughts.
- More extreme seasonal change.

Issues regarding Health:

- Increasing pollution levels is causing unhealthy air quality, which can lead to respiratory problems. For example, Nitrous Oxides, and Carbon Monoxide, which most commonly enter the atmosphere in exhaust fumes from vehicles, can cause serious health risks and illness.
- Diminishing, and contaminated water sources can lead to serious illnesses such as Cholera and dehydration.
- Food shortages can lead to starvation and famine in under-resourced, financially unstable, developing countries.
- Reduction in the number of cold-related illnesses.
- 250,000 additional deaths are forecast per year from 2030 due to climate-sensitive diseases (malaria, dengue, malnutrition, heat stress).

The overall balance of effects on health is likely to be negative and populations in low-income countries are likely to be particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects. The experience of the 2003 heat wave in Europe shows that high-income countries may also be adversely affected. Adaptation to climate change requires public health strategies and improved surveillance. Furthermore, with 2/3 of the world forecast to live in cities by 2050, urban health is likely to decline due to far more people living in close proximity to one another.





Type of outcome	Outcome	Incidence/Prevalence
Food and water-borne disease	Diarrhoea episodes	Incidence
Vector-borne disease	Malaria cases	Incidence
Natural disasters*	Fatal unintentional injuries	Incidence
Risk of malnutrition	Non-availability of recommended daily calorie intake	Prevalence

*All natural disaster impacts are separately attributed to coastal floods and to inland floods/landslides





A drought in California, likely to be a result of human-led climate change.

Financial costs:

- The direct damage costs to health (i.e. excluding costs in health-determining sectors such as agriculture and water and sanitation), is estimated to be between USD 2-4 billion/year by 2030.

WHO Responses:

- Support for implementation of the public health response to climate change: to assist countries to build capacity to reduce health vulnerability to climate change, and promote health while reducing carbon emissions.
- The WHO has encouraged the UN member states to promote public transport and active movement over travel in cars and motorbikes. This has the aim of reducing net carbon emissions, and releases the burden of household and ambient air pollution, which cause more than 7 million premature deaths per year. As it stands, the member states are failing to meet the carbon emission targets set in the Paris Climate Agreement (2016).



- Assistance is being provided to countries in order to build the capacity to reduce health vulnerability to climate change, and promote health whilst reducing carbon emissions
- Reviews of the scientific evidence on the links between climate change and health, and develop a global research agenda are being coordinated.

Challenges for Members of State and the WHO:

- Climate change is something that affects all member states of the EU and the whole world. It has significant effects on even the wealthiest countries such as the United States of America and Australia (shown through recent forest fires). Climate change has resulted in devastating effects that have led to approximately 60000 deaths every year - this number is predicted to exceed 250000 by 2030.
- Climate change takes lives through natural disasters (eg flooding, tropical storms and forest fires), then through waterborne and vector-borne diseases and eventually through a lack of resources.
- The problem is that we have already caused irreversible effects to our climate but the challenge now is to prevent any further damage.

WHO's work plan on climate change and health includes:

- Partnerships: to coordinate with partner agencies within the UN system, and ensure that health is properly represented in the climate change agenda;
- Awareness raising: to provide and disseminate information on the threats that climate change presents to human health, and opportunities to promote health while cutting carbon emissions;
- Science and evidence: to coordinate reviews of the scientific evidence on the links between climate change and health and develop a global research agenda;
- Support for implementation of the public health response to climate change: to assist countries to build capacity to reduce health vulnerability to climate change, and promote health while reducing carbon emissions.



Significant Treaties/Agreements:

- The Paris Agreement is an agreement within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, dealing with greenhouse-gas-emissions mitigation, adaptation, and finance, signed in 2016. It was signed by 195 countries; however its targets are not being met.

Questions for the resolution:

- What can member states do in order to reduce the health impacts of climate change in their own countries?
- What can member states do in order to reduce health impacts of climate change in other countries?
- Should the UN declare a Climate Crisis?
- How can member states include everyone in their efforts to reduce the health effects of Climate Change?
- What can member states do to prevent further health effects throughout the world?

Questions to consider:

- How does climate change potentially impact on the health of the citizens in your country?
- Has there already been an impact on public health as a consequence of climate change in your country (health issues arising from flooding, more extreme seasonal changes etc.)?
- Has changes in air quality impacted on public health in your country?
- What is the impact and what could be the impact of climate change on the social and environmental determinants of health in your country - clean air, safe drinking water, sufficient food and secure shelter?

Useful Links:

<https://www.who.int/globalchange/summary/en/>

https://www.who.int/health-topics/climate-change#tab=tab_1

https://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/en/

