



Press Release

WHO Special Report: Reducing short-lived climate pollutants a must for health and climate

The World Health Organization's Special Report on Health and Climate Change released at COP 24 makes seven recommendations to advance climate, health and development.

Katowice, December 5, 2018: A special World Health Organization (WHO) report released today calls on all countries to “identify and promote actions to reduce both carbon emissions and air pollution, with specific commitments to reduce emissions of short-lived climate pollutants (SLCPs) in their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)”.

The report continues, “targeted action on short-lived climate pollutants would help to save over two million lives each year and reduce the extent of global warming by 0.5 °C, by the middle of the century” and makes the point that integrating actions on climate mitigation, air quality management and health would result in more gains and improve the efficiency of public policy.

The [WHO Special Report on Health and Climate Change](#) was launched at the annual [UN climate summit \(COP 24\)](#) in Katowice, Poland.

Dr Diarmid Campbell-Lendrum, Climate Change and Health Team Leader at the WHO, said the world needs to make the fight for climate action and the fight against air pollution one and the same.

“The evidence is very clear. The most [recent report from the IPCC](#) shows how fast we need to cut carbon dioxide emissions but it also shows we are going to have to cut emissions of short-lived climate pollutants in order to meet the Paris Agreement goals,” Dr Campbell-Lendrum said. “That will bring very large health benefits. The combined effect from addressing climate change and gaining health benefits are much bigger than the trade-offs.”

“We would urge all people, whether you are on the health side or the climate change side to recognize this is the same fight, we have the same answers,” he said.

Dan McDougal, Senior Fellow at the Climate and Clean Coalition, agreed saying tackling both short-lived climate pollutants and carbon dioxide can have immediate benefits.

“We focus on short-lived climate pollutants because of two things – one, the link to health – these are air pollutants that have the most immediate impact on health and tackling them makes real sense, and two because the temperature impact of these highly warming pollutants is many times that of carbon dioxide,” Mr McDougal said. “But since these substances are short lived in the atmosphere, action to prevent their emissions can have an immediate effect on temperature.”

“By taking global action the world can avoid up to 0.6 degrees Celsius of warming between now and 2050,” he said. “So, if we are going to meet the targets set in the Paris Agreement we have to absolutely tackle SLCPs in addition to carbon dioxide.”

The report singles out two short lived climate pollutants with the greatest impact on climate change and health, black carbon and methane.

[Black carbon](#) (or soot), is produced by inefficient combustion in sources such as cookstoves and diesel engines. Black carbon affects regional climate systems, accelerating glacier retreat in mountainous regions and the Arctic and disrupting the South Asian monsoon. It is also a significant contributor (5–15%) of urban exposure to fine particulate matter.

[Methane](#) is a powerful greenhouse gas which reacts with other pollutants to form ozone at ground level, which is responsible for 230 000 deaths from chronic respiratory disease each year.

Reducing short-lived climate pollutants is the first of seven recommendations made in the report. The other six are:

- Include the health implications of mitigation and adaptation measures in the design of economic and fiscal policies, including carbon pricing and the reform of fossil fuel subsidies.
- Include the commitments to safeguard health from the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement, in the rulebook for the Paris Agreement; and systematically include health in NDCs, National Adaptation Plans and National Communications to the UNFCCC.
- Remove existing barriers to investment in health adaptation to climate change, especially for climate-resilient health systems and “climate-smart” health care facilities.
- Facilitate and promote the engagement of the health community as trusted, connected and committed advocates for climate action.
- Mobilize city Mayors and other subnational leaders, as champions of intersectoral action to cut carbon emissions, increase resilience, and promote health.
- Systematically track progress in health resulting from climate change mitigation and adaption, and report to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, global health governance processes and the monitoring system for the SDGs.

The report urges countries to do more to mitigate against climate change saying the benefits far outweigh the costs.

If the mitigation commitments in the Paris Agreement are met, the report says, millions of lives could be saved through reduced air pollution, by the middle of the century. More stringent mitigation policies would also result in greater health benefits.

According to the report, the most recent evidence indicates that the health gains from energy scenarios to meet the Paris climate goals would more than meet the financial cost of mitigation at global level and would exceed that in countries such as China and India by several times.

The report warns that failure to act undermines the social and environmental determinants of health, including people’s access to clean air, safe drinking-water, sufficient food and secure shelter. Climate change will affect the health particularly in the poorest, most vulnerable communities such as small-island developing States (SIDS) and least developed countries, thus widening health inequities.

The COP 24 Special Report: Health and Climate Change was written at the request of Frank Bainimarama, COP 23 President and Prime Minister of Fiji, with the aim to provide:

- Global knowledge on the interconnection between climate change and health.
- An overview of the initiatives and tools with which the national, regional and global public health community is supporting and scaling up actions to implement the Paris Agreement for a healthier, more sustainable society.
- Recommendations for UNFCCC negotiators and policy-makers on maximizing the health benefits of tackling climate change and avoiding the worst health impacts of this global challenge.

You can download the report [here](#).

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