

Courageous and immediate policy action needed to reduce health impacts of climate change

(5 December 2018) End of November 2018, some days before the start of the COP24 in Katowice, new research published in the medical journal "The Lancet" shows that emissions, climate change and rising temperatures are already exposing people around the globe to unacceptably high health risks.

- The [Lancet Countdown 2018 Report](#) tracks 41 indicators across five key domains in health and climate change. These are 1) Climate Change Impacts, Exposures and Vulnerability, 2) Adaptation Planning and Resilience for Health, 3) Mitigation Actions and Health Co-Benefits, 4) Finance and Economics and 5) Public and Political Engagement (on the bottom of this [page](#) you find the detailed indicators and the headlines findings of the report).
- The report arrives at three key conclusions: 1) Impact: Present day changes in heat waves labour capacity, vector-borne disease, and food security provide early warning of compounded and overwhelming impacts expected if temperature continues to rise; 2) Delay: A lack of progress in reducing emissions and building adaptive capacity threatens both human lives and the viability of the national health systems they depend on, with the potential to disrupt core public health infrastructure and overwhelm health services; 3) Opportunity: Despite these delays, trends in a number of sectors see the beginning of a low-carbon transition, and it is clear that the nature and scale of the response to climate change will be the determining factor in shaping the health of nations for centuries to come.
- From a European perspective, of particular concern is the finding that older people in Europe - with the greatest (relative) impact expected in Central Southern Europe - and the Eastern Mediterranean are particularly vulnerable to heat extremes of the last years and even more so to be expected in the future years and decades.

The Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME) has issued a [briefing for EU policymakers](#). It focuses on the links between health and climate change, recognised to be the greatest health threat of the 21st century, and their

implications for the European Union's political commitments. It draws on data provided by the Lancet Countdown to make evidence-informed recommendations for policymakers with the goal of taking advantage of the tremendous health opportunities of an effective response to climate change.

EPSU shares the view that courageous and immediate steps are needed to reduce the negative impacts of climate change and to prepare our health systems to be able to better deal with the likely effects and specific health risks linked to the global heating and related climate changes. The recent [reports](#) of the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) underlines that adaptation is "expected to be more challenging for ecosystems, food and health systems at 2°C of global warming than for 1.5°C". It underlines that "Any increase in global warming is projected to affect human health, with primarily negative consequences (high confidence). Lower risks are projected at 1.5°C than at 2°C for heat-related morbidity and mortality (very high confidence) and for ozone-related mortality if emissions needed for ozone formation remain high (high confidence). Urban heat islands often amplify the impacts of heatwaves in cities (high confidence). Risks from some vector-borne diseases, such as malaria and dengue fever, are projected to increase with warming from 1.5°C to 2°C, including potential shifts in their geographic range." Public health systems will have to be prepared to face these consequences and will need more funding and staff to respond. It is quite clear that there are many other factors that will impact on health systems if global temperature increase can not be limited. Sustainable development, eradication of poverty and reducing inequalities will all become more difficult to achieve.

Below we copy from a [press release issued by the Standing Committee of European Doctors \(CPME\)](#) when publishing the "Lancet Countdown Report 2018 Briefing for EU policymakers":

- Dr. Martin Balzan, CPME Rapporteur on Environmental Health, states: "We hope that EU policy-makers will take to heart the new evidence on the huge threat to people's health climate change poses as they enter the COP24 climate negotiations. This year's heatwave impacted many people in Europe and was a glimpse of what is expected to come in the future. Heat stress is a particular threat to elderly people living in urban areas, and those with pre-existing conditions. The WHO European Region is one of the worst off – with 42% of the population being over 65 years and a more elderly population living in urban areas."

- Whilst the numbers of total deaths is strongly related to population size, the change in death rates can be much greater in regions where conditions are conducive to greater warming, with the greatest impact expected in central southern Europe. It is estimated that mortality increases in Member States will be 1%-4% for each one-degree rise in temperature, meaning that heat-related mortality could rise by 30,000 deaths per year by the 2030s (...).
- Dr. Helene Rossinot, lead author of the briefing said: “The trends in climate change impacts, exposures and vulnerabilities are an unacceptably high risk for the current and future generations. As a doctor, I am worried about the increasing numbers of patients that will soon have to be treated for climate-related illnesses. We need to act now so that future generations don’t have to pay the bill of our carelessness.”
- In addition to an increased frequency and exposure to heatwaves, the new Lancet assessment found a lack of progress in reducing emissions and building adaptive capacity, which threatens both human lives and the viability of the health systems.

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