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Climate Change and Human Health: Impact and adaptation

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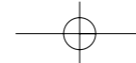


Protection of the
Human
Environment

Geneva

European Centre for
Environment and
Health

Rome



CLIMATE CHANGE AND HUMAN HEALTH: IMPACT AND ADAPTATION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Health is a focus reflecting the combined impacts of climate change on the physical environment, ecosystems, the economic environment and society. Long-term changes in world climate may affect many requisites of good health – sufficient food, safe and adequate drinking water, and secure dwelling. The current large-scale social and environmental changes mean that we must assign a much higher priority to population health in the policy debate on climate change.

Climate change will affect human health and well-being through a variety of mechanisms. Climate change can adversely impact the availability of fresh water supplies, and the efficiency of local sewerage systems. It is also likely to affect food security. Cereal yields are expected to increase at high and mid latitudes but decrease at lower latitudes. Changes in food production are likely to significantly affect health in Africa. In addition, the distribution and seasonal transmission of several vector-borne infectious diseases (such as malaria, dengue and schistosomiasis) may be affected by climate change. Altered distribution of some vector species may be among the early signs of climate change that may affect health. A change in world climate could increase the frequency and severity of extreme weather events. The impacts on health of natural disasters are considerable – the number of people killed, injured or made homeless from such causes is increasing alarmingly. The vulnerability of people living in risk-prone areas is an important contributor to disaster casualties and damage. An increase in heatwaves (and possibly air pollution) will be a problem in urban areas, where excess mortality and morbidity is currently observed during hot weather episodes.

Adaptation is a key response strategy to minimize potential impacts of climate change. A primary objective of adaptation is the reduction, with the least cost, of death, disease, disability and human suffering. The ability to adapt to climate change, and specifically the impacts on health, will depend on many factors including existing infrastructure, resources, technology, information and the level of equity in different countries and regions. Cross-sectoral policies that promote ecologically sustainable

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