Upward trend of deaths and disability-adjusted life-years attributable to chemicals

On 7 July 2021, during the Berlin Forum on Chemicals and Sustainability, WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus announced an update to the 2016 WHO publication *The public health impact of chemicals: knowns and unknowns*. The 2021 addendum estimates the loss of 2 million lives and 53 million disability-adjusted life-years (DALYs) in 2019 due to exposures to selected chemicals. These estimates are higher than those in 2016 (1.6 million lives and 45 million DALYs) and 2012 (1.3 million lives and 43 million DALYs).

Nearly half of deaths attributable to chemical exposures in 2019 were due to lead exposure and resulting cardiovascular diseases. The other largest contributors were chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) from occupational exposure to particulates and cancers from occupational exposure to carcinogens. Data are, however, only available for a small number of chemical exposures, whereas people are exposed to many more chemicals every day.

Online self-training course on the WHO Chemicals Road Map
The WHO self-training course on the Chemicals Road Map is already available in English, French and Spanish on the Virtual Campus for Public Health of the PAHO/WHO website and the WHO Chemicals Road Map website.

It consists of four modules covering: the global policy context of the road map; the road map with its concrete actions; the workbook; a questionnaire and case studies to summarize the knowledge gained during the course. At the end of the course, participants will be familiar with the working tools to actively engage the health sector in chemicals management and how to develop an implementation plan containing priorities and opportunities for collaboration and support. The course is assigned a total of 30 hours.

The course will be continually improved, if necessary, and updated in line with the newest information related to the Chemicals Road Map.
The Berlin Forum on Chemicals and Sustainability: Ambition and action towards 2030

The Berlin Forum took place virtually from 7 to 8 July 2021 and considered the future structuring of global chemicals and waste management. On the first day, a high-level dialogue took place at the ministerial level with 42 high-level speakers, including the WHO Director-General. They addressed the following topics: (1) health and justice, (2) the 2030 Agenda and the sound management of chemicals and waste and (3) circular economy and sustainable chemistry.

The stakeholder dialogue took place on the second day. Representatives from governments, international organizations, science, business and civil society discussed further improvements in global chemicals and waste management considering the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Science–Policy Interface.

The two-day virtual event demonstrated high political priority for international chemicals and waste management. It emphasized the need for joint actions of all international actors to achieve chemical safety. Participants in the Berlin Forum reaffirmed their goal of creating an ambitious framework for international chemicals and waste management at the Fifth Meeting of the International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM5). A summary about the Berlin Forum prepared by organizers is available on the SharePoint Site of the Network in the section News and Updates.

On 7 July 2021, on the occasion of the Berlin Forum, a virtual press conference was held by the German Federal Minister for the Environment, Svenja Schulze, with the Director of the WHO Department of Public Health, Environment and Social Determinants of Health, Dr Maria Neira. During the conference, Dr Neira presented the first comprehensive WHO publication on electronic waste, entitled Children and digital dumpsites, e-waste exposure and child health, which touches upon, among other issues, the problem of inappropriate recycling of waste electrical and electronic equipment.
WHO PUBLICATIONS

The following have been published by WHO:

- An addendum to the 2016 WHO publication *The public health impact of chemicals: knowns and unknowns* and an update of the main data tables and figures for the year 2019.

- A *Manual for investigating suspected outbreaks of illnesses of possible chemical etiology: guidance for investigation and control*, which provides a practical guide for public health and allied professionals to the investigation of clusters and outbreaks in which a noncommunicable cause (in particular, a chemical substance) is considered a distinct possibility.

- A *Compendium of WHO and other UN guidance on health and environment*, which provides a systematic compilation of published guidance from WHO and other United Nations organizations on health and environment. Guidance on policies and actions, as well as awareness-raising and capacity-building interventions is presented for all major areas of health and environment. Guidance referring to priority settings for action such as cities and other urban settlements, housing, workplaces and health-care facilities is also listed.

- A *Report on activities during the eighth International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week* held on 25–31 October 2020 with more than 90 events in 60 countries, organized by governments, intergovernmental organizations and civil society organizations, health partners, industry and other institutions. The 2020 campaign advocated for accelerated action towards global phasing out of lead paint through regulatory and legal measures.

- The FAO/WHO “*International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management. Guidance on pesticide licensing schemes*”. This guidance sets out and discusses national pesticide licensing schemes. It provides concrete guidance and options for countries wishing to establish or strengthen their programmes for licensing of activities associated with pesticides, including importation, storage, distribution, sale and specific uses. The guidance covers pesticides used in agriculture and public health (e.g. for vector control) and also pesticides for household use and for industrial use.
The new national case studies on the implementation of the Chemicals Road Map are available on the GCHN website. So far, we have collected case studies from Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bhutan (three documents), Brazil, Canada, Georgia (two documents), Germany, Jordan, Liberia, Morocco, New Zealand, Nigeria, Philippines, Serbia, Thailand, Mutualites Libres and Health Care Without Harm. The majority of the case studies have already been published and others will be available soon.

All Network members are invited to visit the website and also to prepare their case study.

Raising awareness on the WHO Chemicals Road Map
A webinar on the WHO Chemicals Road Map for countries in the African Region was organized by the Regional Office for Africa on 22 July 2021; 34 participants took part. The webinar aimed to:

- support Member States’ implementation of the Road Map,
- discuss the health sector’s role in the sound management of chemicals,
- share country experience in the implementation of the Road Map at the national level, and
- inform about the status of implementation of the Road Map in the Region.

Online self-training course on the WHO Chemicals Road Map in English, French and Spanish is already AVAILABLE.

Accessible from both the Virtual Campus for Public Health of the PAHO/WHO website and the WHO Chemicals Road Map website.

The course aims to assist countries and health sector stakeholders in defining priority ideas for their participation in the sound management of chemicals, recognizing the need for cooperation between various sectors at national, regional and international levels.

If any participant needs help with enrolling in or navigating the course, please contact the Help Desk directly: https://www.campusvirtualsp.org/en/contact

For further information, please contact the GCHN Secretariat at: gchn@who.int