

Children's environmental health

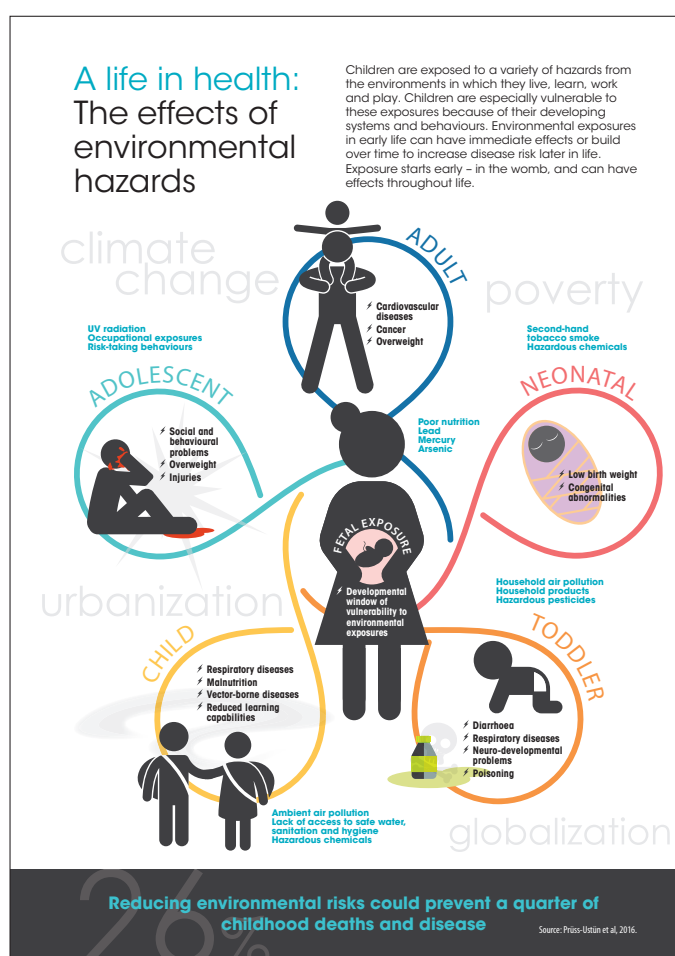
Inheriting a sustainable world

A safe, healthy and protective environment is key to ensuring that children grow and develop normally. Children are particularly vulnerable to air pollution, hazardous chemicals, climate change stressors, and inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene.

Impacts on children's health and development

Environmental exposures start in the womb, and can have effects throughout life.

The prenatal and early childhood period represents a window of particular vulnerability, where environmental hazards can lead to premature birth and other complications. Early childhood exposure to such hazards can also increase lifelong disease risk including for respiratory disorders, cardiovascular disease and cancers. Reducing children's environmental risks, therefore, offer a major opportunity for improving children's health in every region of the world.

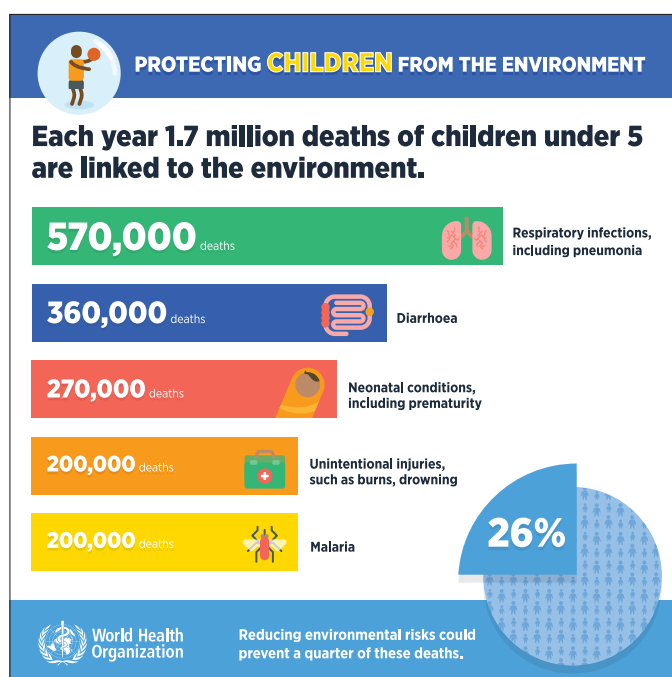


Unhealthy environments – the toll on childhood mortality

Reducing environmental risks could prevent more than a quarter of the 5.9 million deaths of children under 5 years (2015). Childhood deaths from key risks (2012) range from nearly 600,000 preventable deaths annually from air pollution-related diseases to about 200,000 deaths from malaria cases preventable through environmental management.

Children in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda – New Opportunities for Action

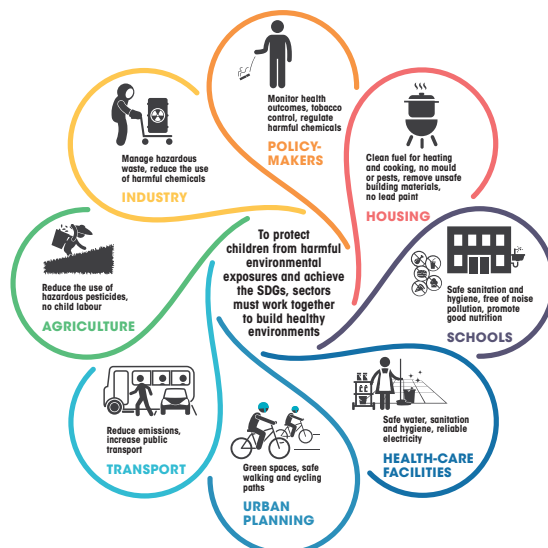
Children are at the heart of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), because it is children who will inherit the legacy of policies and actions taken, or not, by leaders today. The third SDG, to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages,” has as its foundation children's environmental health. Since most environmental health risks to children occur in the home and community environment, action requires multisectoral cooperation and action across the SDG spectrum.





Healthy environments for children: Key to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

Every Sustainable Development Goal has the potential to impact the development of healthy environments for children.



For instance, better urban design as represented in SDG 11 for Sustainable Cities, can help reduce the exposure of children to housing risks, traffic injury, and improve children's opportunities for health physical activity and play in green spaces. Access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene, as per SDG 6, is key to preventing childhood diarrhoea deaths. SDG 12 for Responsible Consumption and Production highlights actions we can take to provide environmentally sound management of chemicals and wastes, preventing childhood poisonings and exposures. And SDGs 7 (Affordable Clean Energy) and SDG 13 (Climate Action) reduce health-harmful air pollution as well as the catastrophic effects to children's health that future climate change and environmental degradation will bring.

WHO's Response

WHO in collaboration with and partners at United Nations level, WHO Collaborating centres, non-governmental organizations and academia is working at global, regional and country level in the following areas:

- Build the capacity of the health sector to prevent childhood diseases of environmental origins;
- Develop technical and training materials to help health professionals recognize and prevent environmentally-related childhood diseases related to key risks, such as air pollution.
- Develop field interventions aimed at reducing exposure and preventing or decreasing the burden of disease on children;
- Develop research agendas aimed at building evidence on topics such as the childhood origins of adult disease;
- Provide health leadership in the context of interagency initiatives on e-waste, chemicals and other multi-sectoral initiatives related to children's environmental health;
- Raise awareness about the impact of environmental risks on child health and associated solutions in alignment with the SDGs;
- Advocate for environmental determinants and interventions to be included within child and maternal health programmes such as the Global Strategy for Mothers', Children's and Adolescents' Health.

Children's environmental health tools and publications

- Inheriting a sustainable world? Atlas on children's health and the environment¹
- Don't pollute my future! The impact of the environment on children's health²
- Infographics for action (in 6 languages)³
- 10 facts on children's environmental health⁴
- Training Package for Health Care Providers on Children's Environmental Health⁵



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<http://www.who.int/ceh>

Endnotes:

- 1 <http://www.who.int/ceh/publications/inheriting-a-sustainable-world/en/>
- 2 <http://www.who.int/ceh/publications/don-t-pollute-my-future/en/>
- 3 <http://www.who.int/phe/infographics/en/>
- 4 http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/children_environmental_health/en/
- 5 <http://www.who.int/ceh/capacity/trainpackage/en/>