



**EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT
AND HEALTH PROCESS**



World Health
Organization
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR
Europe



UNECE

UN
environment
programme

EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH PROCESS NEWSLETTER

July–September 2021

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July–September 2021

1. EDITORIAL

Welcome to the September issue of the [European Environment and Health Process](#) (EHP) newsletter.

It offers updates on preparations and developments related to the implementation of the [Ostrava Declaration](#), and calls on national governments, regional and global organizations, and stakeholders to engage in far-reaching environment and health activities, drawing lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Enjoy the reading and the golden colours of autumn.

Best regards,
EHP Secretariat



2. TOP STORIES

New WHO Global Air Quality Guidelines to strengthen health argument for climate action

On 22 September 2021, WHO launched the new [WHO Global Air Quality Guidelines](#) (AQGs). The new guidelines provide clear evidence of the damage air pollution inflicts on human health and recommend new air quality levels to protect the health of populations, by reducing levels of key air pollutants, some of which also contribute to climate change.

The AQGs will help to guide legislation and policies to reduce levels of air pollutants and decrease the burden of disease that results from exposure to air pollution worldwide.

Did you know?

Air pollution is one of the biggest environmental threats to human health, alongside climate change. WHO estimates that around 7 million premature deaths every year are due to the effects of air pollution, with more than 500 000 of those deaths occurring in the WHO European Region. Concerted action to reduce air pollution would save lives and reduce the burden of disease.



The guidelines have been developed by an international group of leading scientists, under the coordination of the WHO European Centre for Environment and Health (WHO ECEH).

For more information, please visit:

- News on the WHO/Europe website <https://www.euro.who.int/en/media-centre/sections/>

[press-releases/2021/new-who-global-air-quality-guidelines-aim-to-save-millions-of-lives-from-air-pollution](https://www.euro.who.int/en/press-releases/2021/new-who-global-air-quality-guidelines-aim-to-save-millions-of-lives-from-air-pollution)

- The AQGs <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/345329>
- Executive summary of the AQGs <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/345334>
- Short video explaining the AQGs https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=qOC58LJV7Kk&feature=emb_logo
- AQGs launch event <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hiO5V4ZZRwI>

Scaling up action on climate mitigation and adaptation for health in the WHO European Region

As part of the **71st session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe (RC71)**, WHO ECEH hosted a technical briefing on “**Elevating climate change in the health debate**” on 16 September 2021. The technical briefing on scaling up action on climate change mitigation and adaptation for health (see publications below) informed RC71 delegates on the latest global and regional developments on climate change and health, with a particular focus on the preparations for the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26) and its Health Programme (see upcoming events below), and provided an opportunity to discuss the challenges and opportunities ahead. The briefing made clear that the health response to climate change deserves our undivided attention. It highlighted the synergies and

“...as we have seen from the recent devastating floods in western Europe, climate change presents a new and frightening level of risk for a range of health consequences, including drowning, that have not been properly recognized”

*Dr Hans Henri P. Kluge
WHO Regional Director for Europe*

health co-benefits of tackling air pollution in tandem with mitigating climate change, but also the need to strengthen the role of the health sector in leading the response to the climate crisis, both in terms of adaptation and mitigation.



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Bonn School on Environment and Health: Leading Transformation in Environment and Health

Virtual, 9 November – 2 December 2021

WHO ECEH is offering a unique training to Member States in the European Region on the interface between science and practice, with a focus on air quality, climate change, contaminated sites, and the health and environment research agenda. Through topic-specific courses that combine technical training, cross-cutting subjects and leadership, the Bonn

School will provide quality, competency and need-based professional training, to enhance leadership for environment and health at the national level. The invitation is addressed to both the health and environment sectors with 4 nominations each (total of 8 nominees per Member State). Please write to us at eurobonnschool@who.int for inquiries and join more than 120 participants who have already enrolled from 30 countries.

3. COUNTRY ACTIVITIES

- On 21–24 September, WHO ECEH, in collaboration with the WHO Country Office in the **Russian Federation** and the City of Moscow, organized a series of the master classes involving participants from more than 10 regions of the country and representatives from different divisions of the Moscow administration. The international experts highlighted WHO tools addressing air pollution ([AirQ+](#)), green space and health ([GreenUr](#)) and active mobility ([HEAT](#) for cycling and walking).
- On 13 September, WHO ECEH in collaboration with **Israel's** Ministry of Environmental Protection organized a full-day workshop for reviewing 8 research projects as part of the “Environmental Epidemiology Research in Haifa Bay” programme led by the Ministry of Environmental Protection in collaboration with the Ministry of Health. WHO coordinated the reviewers for these research projects.
- To better prepare for and protect the world from global disease threats, a new [WHO Hub for Pandemic and Epidemic Intelligence](#) opened in Berlin, **Germany** on 1 September 2021. The WHO Hub is a new collaboration of countries and partners worldwide, driving innovations to increase the availability of key data; develop state-of-the-art analytic tools and predictive models for risk analysis; and link communities of practice around the world.
- Azerbaijan** is planning to update its national drinking-water quality regulations and standards. A National Working Group has been established and tasked with guiding the update of the standard. WHO ECEH is supporting the process by providing advice and supporting evidence. On 6 August 2021, WHO ECEH organized an advisory consultation with the National Working Group to discuss the scope and structure of the standard.



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- To promote the use of the screening tool IAQRiskCalculator, on 3 August 2021, WHO ECEH in collaboration with the Ministry of Health of **Belarus** organized a training at the national level. The training participants discussed [methods for assessing health risks due to combined exposure to multiple chemicals in indoor air](#) and implemented practical exercises on calculation of risks using the IAQRiskCalculator.
- On 28–29 July and 3 August 2021, WHO ECEH organized trainings within the framework of the project “Strengthening of national capacities for assessment of chemicals risks to guide risk reduction decision” (participating countries – **Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Republic of Moldova** and **Serbia**). The trainings addressed [basic chemical risk assessment](#); assessment of health risks of biocides/disinfectants (based on European Union (EU) requirements); and [assessment of health risks from combined exposure to multiple chemicals](#). The trainings aimed at strengthening competencies in applying risk assessment methodologies at national level.
- On 5–7 July 2021, WHO ECEH in collaboration with the Institute of Public Health and the WHO Country Office in **Montenegro** conducted a 3-day training on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in health-care facilities. The aim of the training was to prepare a comprehensive national assessment in response to the [World Health Assembly \(WHA\) resolution on WASH in health-care facilities](#). In July–September, national teams conducted field assessments throughout the country using survey instruments developed by WHO ECEH.
- On 29 June – 1 July 2021, WHO ECEH in collaboration with the National Centre for Disease Control and Public Health in **Georgia** conducted a 3-day training on WASH in health-care facilities, similar to the above.

4. ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH AND COVID-19

COVID-19 pandemic calls for urgent reform of health care, surveillance and governance in WHO European Region and beyond

The [Pan-European Commission on Health and Sustainable Development](#) is an independent and interdisciplinary group of leaders convened by WHO/Europe to rethink policy priorities in the light of pandemics.

Over the past year, members of the Commission have reflected on what worked and, more

often, what did not work in the COVID-19 response and in previous crises, and issued a final report “[Drawing light from the pandemic: a new strategy for health and sustainable development](#)”, launched at [RC71](#) on 13 September 2021.



The report includes a series of recommendations for the 53 countries in the European Region, calling for Member States to:

- adopt a [One Health](#) policy recognizing the interconnection of human, animal and environmental health;
- address the deep-seated health, social, economic and gender inequalities exposed by the pandemic;

- invest in innovation, data collection and sharing, and strong national health systems;
- improve regional and global health governance, learning lessons from COVID-19.

For more information on the whole work of the Commission, please see materials below:

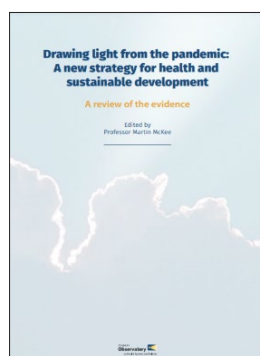
Recommendations of the Commission



This report presents a series of recommendations with the aim of achieving 7 key objectives to prevent a catastrophe on the same scale as COVID-19 from happening again.

<https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-policy/>

[european-programme-of-work/pan-european-commission-on-health-and-sustainable-development/publications/drawing-light-from-the-pandemic-a-new-strategy-for-health-and-sustainable-development-2021](https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-policy/european-programme-of-work/pan-european-commission-on-health-and-sustainable-development/publications/drawing-light-from-the-pandemic-a-new-strategy-for-health-and-sustainable-development-2021)



This evidence review has been prepared to inform the work of the Commission and it reflects on the experiences of the pandemic and the legacy that COVID-19 has left us, which is our starting point for building back better.

<https://www.euro.who.int/en/media-centre/sections/press-releases/2021/the-covid-19-pandemic-calls-for-urgent-reform-of-health-care-surveillance-and-governance-in-the-who-european-region-and-beyond/evidence-review-drawing-light-from-the-pandemic-a-new-strategy-for-health-and-sustainable-development.-2021>



This video explains the Commission's recommendations in a concise way. Click on the “play” button and enjoy 3 minutes of interesting explanation on how to prevent a catastrophe of this scale from happening again.

If you wish to share information on how your country is responding to the environment and health dimensions of the COVID-19 pandemic with the European Environment and Health Task Force (EHTF) and partners of the EHP, the EHP Secretariat will be happy to assist you. Please contact us at euceh@who.int.



5. RECENT EVENTS

- On 28 September 2021, WHO ECEH in cooperation with WHO headquarters organized a webinar to facilitate the implementation of the **Minamata Convention on Mercury** in the health sector in the WHO European Region, including through promoting the actions of WHA Resolution 67.11 “[Public health impacts of exposure to mercury and mercury compounds: the role of WHO and ministries of public health in the implementation of the Minamata Convention](#)”. The meeting highlighted the role and responsibilities of the health sector, as well as the necessary support required to implement the Convention and facilitate its ratification.
- On 13–15 September 2021, health ministers and high-level representatives of the 53 Member States of the WHO European Region, along with partner organizations and civil society, met virtually for **RC71**, the Region’s annual decision-making meeting. Meeting participants marked achievements, reflected on lessons learned so far from the COVID-19 pandemic and determined priorities for the coming year as they strive for a healthier, safer and more prosperous Region – one that builds back better and more resilient.
- On 7 September 2021, the second **International Day of Clean Air for blue skies** reflected and reinvigorated the resolve and ambitions for #HealthyAirHealthyPlanet. The 2021 theme emphasized the correlation between human and planetary health, which is particularly relevant in the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Watch the recording of this year’s celebrations [here](#). Also, check out a podcast episode of “Inside UN Bonn”, where WHO ECEH highlights why we should not underestimate air pollution (available [here](#)).
- In August 2021, WHO ECEH held a series of preparatory meetings with experts from the [South East European \(SEE\) Network on Workers’ Health](#) related to **actions to strengthen the resilience of health workers in SEE in response to COVID-19**, focusing on implementation of [WHO and International Labour Organization guidance](#).
- This year, 25 July marked the inaugural **World Drowning Prevention Day**. This latest addition to the United Nations calendar of official days was adopted by all Member States of the United Nations in a [resolution](#) earlier this year – calling for greater attention and action on a public health disaster that claims a life every 2 minutes worldwide, or 235 000 people every year. In the WHO European Region, drowning kills more than 19 000 people each year. Check out a short video on drowning awareness [here](#).
- On 23 July and 20 September 2021, WHO ECEH organized 2 meetings of the Coordination Group on deriving disability weights for health effects of **environmental noise**. Experts met to discuss different methodological aspects of the study.
- On 6–8 July 2021, WHO ECEH organized a **subregional workshop on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in schools**. The virtual session was attended by around 60 delegates from both health and education sectors from 7 eastern European and Baltic countries (Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Republic of Moldova, Russian Federation and Ukraine) and invited experts from Hungary, Serbia and the United Kingdom. The workshop took



place under the framework of the [Protocol on Water and Health](#) with the objective of providing an up-to-date overview of health and education considerations for ensuring adequate WASH in schools. It also aimed to support uptake of the [recommendations](#)

developed by WHO ECEH together with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), including on the safe reopening of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

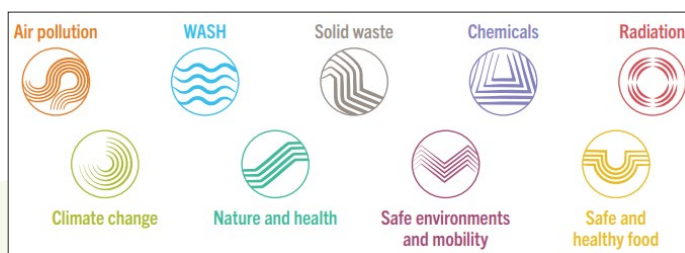
6. LATEST PUBLICATIONS

Global repository of interventions for creating healthier environments and improving health



This compendium provides an overview of and easy access to 500 actions, and a framework for thinking about health and environment interventions. The target audience is practitioners and key decision-makers at national, regional and municipal levels.

The environment in this compendium refers to the following environmental factors:



◆ [Compendium of WHO and other UN guidance on health and environment](#)



Scaling up action on climate change mitigation and adaptation for health



The Zero Regrets initiative by the EHTF Working Group on Health in Climate Change addresses policy-makers, particularly from the health sector to raise awareness about the links between health and climate change, as well as the policy options that can maximize the benefits for health and the environment. It further aims to equip them with evidence and messages to support an active engagement in national preparatory consultations for and negotiations at COP26, and indicates areas for action and collaboration across sectoral boundaries and social actors.

◆ [Zero regrets: scaling up action on climate change mitigation and adaptation for health in the WHO European Region. Key messages from the Working Group on Health in Climate Change](#)



This report presents 10 recommendations in the COP26 Special Report on Climate Change and Health and proposes a set of priority actions from the global health community to governments and policy makers, calling on them to act with urgency on the current climate and health crises. The recommendations were developed in consultation with over 150 organizations and 400 experts and health professionals.

◆ [COP26 Special Report on Climate Change and Health](#)

Public health impact of chemicals

THE PUBLIC HEALTH IMPACT OF CHEMICALS KNOWN AND UNKNOWN
Data addendum for 2019

This is an addendum to the WHO publication "The public health impact of chemicals: knowns and unknowns" (2016) and presents an update of the main data tables and figures for the year 2019.

Table 1: Global estimates of the public health impact of chemicals, known and unknown, 2019

Region	Estimated population (2019)	Estimated deaths (2019)	Estimated DALYs (2019)
World	7.8 billion	9.1 million	103 million
Africa	1.3 billion	1.1 million	13 million
Europe	0.7 billion	0.1 million	1.1 million
South-East Asia	2.0 billion	0.4 million	4.5 million
Americas	1.0 billion	0.2 million	2.2 million
Western Pacific	4.5 billion	7.3 million	83 million

Table 2: Estimated population exposed to chemicals, known and unknown, 2019

Region	Estimated population (2019)	Estimated deaths (2019)	Estimated DALYs (2019)
World	7.8 billion	9.1 million	103 million
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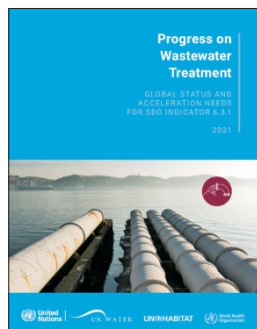
This is an addendum to the WHO publication "[The public health impact of chemicals: knowns and unknowns](#)" (2016) and presents an update of the main data tables and figures for the year 2019.

Did you know? The new estimates show a continuing increase compared to earlier years, with 2 million lives and 53 million disability-adjusted life years lost in 2019 due to chemical exposures.

◆ [The public health impact of chemicals: knowns and unknowns – 2021 data addendum](#)

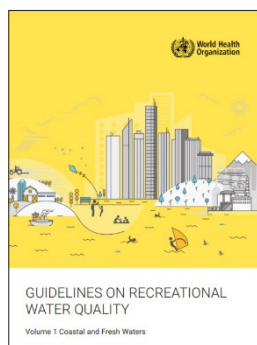


Wastewater treatment, recreational water quality and household access to basic and safely managed WASH services



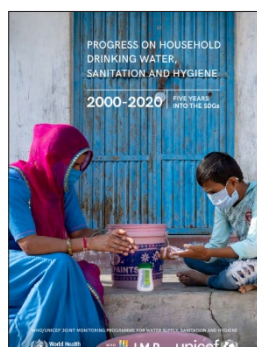
This report presents the global status of wastewater treatment and acceleration needs to achieve Sustainable Development Goal target 6.3 by 2030, based on the latest data on indicator 6.3.1 (total wastewater flows as well as flows from industrial sources and households).

◆ [Progress on wastewater treatment – 2021 update](#)



These guidelines focus on water quality management for coastal and freshwater environments to protect public health. The guidelines are aimed at national and local authorities, and other entities with an obligation to exercise due diligence relating to the safety of recreational water sites.

◆ [Guidelines on recreational water quality: Volume 1. Coastal and fresh waters](#)



This report presents estimates on household access to basic and safely managed drinking water, sanitation and hygiene services over the past 5 years, and assesses progress toward achieving SDG 6 to “ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all by 2030”. For the first time, the report also presents emerging national data on menstrual health.

◆ [Progress on household drinking water, sanitation and hygiene 2000–2020](#)

Public health advice on wildfires and floods

- This year several countries across the WHO European Region – including Albania, Greece, Israel, Italy, North Macedonia and Turkey – have experienced severe wildfires that are posing a health risk to people and communities. The fires are caused by both excessive heat during heatwaves, combined with strong winds, and by man-made factors. WHO/Europe stands ready to support affected countries, including by rapidly deploying emergency supplies upon request.

◆ [Health advice: wildfires in the WHO European Region](#)



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- Flooding has widespread and significant health effects over short and long terms, ranging from drowning and injuries to infectious diseases and mental-health problems. The longer-term health effects result from displacement, physical injuries and psychosocial impact; disruption of access to health and other essential services due to infrastructure damage; and the slow recovery of flood affected areas. This year, the floods in western Europe are the worst seen in a generation. Germany and Belgium have been the worst affected, with the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Switzerland also afflicted. Adequate long-term planning is vital to minimize the health effects of floods – using a wide, multisectoral, all-hazards approach to emergency preparedness in developing local plans that include public health and primary care.

◆ [Public health advice for flooding in western Europe](#)

Must read picks for this autumn:

How can vegetation protect us from air pollution?

◆ [A critical review on green spaces' mitigation abilities for air-borne particles from a public health perspective – with implications for urban planning](#)

WHO Air Quality Guidelines 2021 – aiming for healthier air for all

◆ [A joint statement by medical, public health, scientific societies and patient representative organisations](#)

◆ The Lancet: [WHO introduces ambitious new air quality guidelines](#)

◆ The British Medical Journal: [WHO cuts air pollution limits to save millions of lives](#)

Tracking progress on health and climate change in Europe

◆ The Lancet Countdown in Europe is established as a transdisciplinary research collaboration for monitoring progress on health and climate change in Europe. WHO ECEH is a partner in this collaboration. More on the framework for the Lancet Countdown in Europe is available [here](#).

Evidence and policies on planetary health

◆ [Planetary health: safeguarding human health and the environment in the Anthropocene](#)



7. EHP CORNER

- On 12 July 2021, WHO ECEH organized the **first meeting of the EHP Communications Network**, a body established by the EHTF to facilitate communication and exchange of information between the EHP Secretariat and communication experts in Member States. The meeting participants confirmed their willingness to support the development of the EHP Communications Strategy for 2022–2023 and implementation of the EHP Roadmap. The EHP Secretariat is also exploring the possibility of establishing a

directory of communications focal points in countries – stay tuned!

- The annual “[Progress report on the implementation of the European Environment and Health Process](#)” was submitted to RC71 and to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Committee on Environmental Policy, in accordance with [Annex II of the Ostrava Declaration](#). The report is available in English, French, German and Russian.

8. NEWS FROM EHP STAKEHOLDERS AND PARTNERS

Third review of implementation of the Protocol on Strategic Environmental Assessment 2016–2018

Governments shape the future of communities by defining development strategies for nations and regions. These governmental plans and programmes, as well as policies and legislation, establish the basis for future decisions on projects in such diverse fields as agriculture, energy, industry, transport, regional development, land use, waste management and water management. It is crucial that environmental and health considerations are among the decision-making factors. To ensure this, many countries apply a systematic and anticipatory planning tool called Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

In this context, check out the new UNECE report, which presents the [third review of implementation of the Protocol on SEA](#). It examines responses to a questionnaire on the Parties' legal implementation of, and their practical experiences with, the Protocol from 2016 to 2018, with a view to enhancing the implementation of and compliance with the legal provisions of the Protocol.

The 10th meeting of the Working Group on EIA and SEA (Espoo Convention) will be held on 1–3 December 2021.



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EU aims to emerge stronger and more resilient from the current COVID-19 crisis

The [Recovery and Resilience Facility](#) is the key instrument to help the EU emerge stronger and more resilient from the current crisis. This instrument makes financial support in loans and grants, which is available to support reforms and investments undertaken by Member States. The aim is to mitigate the economic and social impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and make European economies and societies more

sustainable, resilient and better prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the green and digital transitions.

Click on the hyperlink above and see if your country has already submitted its national recovery and resilience plans to the European Commission.

Health and Environment Research Agenda (HERA)

On behalf of the research project consortium, which WHO ECEH is a member of, the HERA team has the pleasure to share with you the final draft of the “[EU research agenda for the environment, climate and health 2021–2030](#)”. This document sets the priorities for EU research in the field of environment and health by identifying topics that the EU needs to address in order to strengthen the link between environment and health and improve well-being.

The Agenda has been developed under an EU Horizon 2020 project by a consortium of 24 organizations from 15 countries, with input from a wide range of stakeholders (see [www.](#)

[heraresearcheu.eu](#)) for more details on the project Integrating Environment and Health Research: a Vision for the EU) and it is now in the final stages.

You are also hereby invited to read the Agenda and share your comments with HERA, in particular on the relevance of identified research needs and proposals. The consultation is open until 23 October 2021 and stakeholder views will be collected in an online form: <https://www.heraresearcheu.eu/hera-2030-agenda>.

The input received will be summarized in a chapter attached to the Agenda when it is released in its final form later this year.



9. UPCOMING EVENTS

9th session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (virtual, 29 September–1 October 2021);

Expert consultation on on-site sanitation in the pan-European region (virtual, 5–7 October 2021);

26th meeting of the Bureau of the Protocol on Water and Health (virtual, 11 October 2021);

Bonn Dialogue on Environment and Health: air quality and health (virtual, 14 October 2021);

8th meeting of the EHTF Bureau (virtual, 14 October 2021);

[UN Biodiversity Conference](#) (virtual, 14–15 October 2021);

7th session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) (virtual, 18–21 October 2021)

9th [International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week](#) (virtual, 24–30 October 2021);

Expert meeting on prevention and control of Legionellosis in the pan-European region (virtual, 30 November–2 December 2021);

[19th session of the Steering Committee of the Transport, Health and Environment Pan-European Programme](#) (virtual, 27–28 October 2021);

2021 Global Conference on Health and Climate Change (Glasgow, 6 November 2021);

26th United Nations Climate Change Conference (Glasgow, 31 October–12 November 2021), including a WHO ECEH led event “Take action now. Elevate public health in the climate change response” (Glasgow, 11 November 2021, 14:15–15:15 (GMT) (15:15–16:15 CET));

27th session of the UNECE Committee on Environmental Policy (Geneva, 3–5 November 2021);

Bonn School on Environment and Health (virtual, 9 November–2 December 2021);

[3rd EU Clean Air Forum](#) (Madrid, 18–19 November 2021);

12th meeting of the Task Force on Target Setting and Reporting under the Protocol on Water and Health (virtual, 17–18 November 2021);

27th meeting of the Bureau of the Protocol on Water and Health (virtual, 19 November 2021);



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Expert Consultation on the Implementation of Health Impact Assessment and the Integration of Health in Environmental Assessment and Environmental Strategic Assessment (virtual, 25 November 2021);

Bonn Dialogue on Environment and Health: nature and biodiversity for health and well-being (virtual, 8 December 2021);

Launch of “Protecting health through urban redevelopment of contaminated sites: a planning brief” (virtual, 6 December 2021);

11th meeting of the EHTF (virtual, 9–10 December 2021).



10. CONTACT US

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