

**REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE
EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN
Sixty-ninth Session
Cairo, Egypt, 10–13 October 2022**

October 2022

**ONE PLANET, ONE HEALTH: SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT HEALTH CARE
SYSTEMS**

Objectives of the event

On 12 October 2022, a side event will be held on One Planet, One Health: sustainable and resilient health care systems.

The objectives of the event are to:

- highlight the importance of monitoring, anticipating, managing and adapting to the health risks associated with climate change;
- emphasize the need to work with other health-determining sectors (including water and sanitation, energy, transportation, food, urban planning and environment) to prepare for additional health risks posed by climate change through a resilience-based approach, and to promote environmentally sustainable practices in providing health services; and
- publicize WHO tools for assisting health care facility officials in assessing their resilience to climate change threats, and their environmental sustainability in terms of use of resources and release of hazardous materials (biological, chemical and radiological) into the environment.

Background

Climate change is now regarded as the biggest global health threat of the 21st century (1). In addition, there is growing evidence that numerous human activities continue to cause environmental pollution and loss of biodiversity. These factors are leading not only to the emergence of new diseases but also to the redistribution of existing diseases. Exacerbated by climate change, environmental risk factors are being increasingly driven by a range of ecological, social and economic threats. Such threats include conflicts, pandemics, fragile ecosystems, deteriorating environments, unsustainable development, rapid urbanization, and weak and fragmented environmental health monitoring and surveillance systems.

For example, it has been estimated that more than 30% of all emerging infectious diseases in humans can be attributed to land use change, agricultural expansion and urbanization. Around 70% of all such diseases are caused by microbes found in animals which spread following contact between wildlife, livestock and people – with almost all human pandemics being caused by zoonoses (2). Furthermore, climate change is influencing the evolution of organisms and is leading to new human diseases, environmental decline and the increased vulnerability of populations. As the climate continues to change, risks to health systems and facilities – including hospitals, clinics and community care centers – are increasing. This in turn is reducing the ability of health professionals to protect people from a range of health and climate hazards.

Recognizing the urgent need to build climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable health systems, the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean has organized this side-event.

Challenges in the Region

Environmental risks are responsible for about 23% of the total burden of disease in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region, increasing to about 30% in children. The health impacts of environmental risks manifest as communicable diseases (19%), noncommunicable diseases (53%) and injuries (28%) in the

countries of the Region (3). It is estimated that about 1 million people in the Region die prematurely every year as a result of living and/or working in unhealthy environments. More than half of such deaths (~500 000 annually) are attributable to air pollution. The other half is due to chemicals and other occupational exposures, lack of access to water and sanitation, and other environmental risks. In addition, more than 100 million people in the Region fall ill every year from foodborne diseases, with an estimated 40 000 people (mostly children) dying as a result (4).

Health care facilities in many countries of the Region lack functioning infrastructure and a trained health workforce, with many experiencing energy supply issues, and poor water, sanitation and waste management services. Improving these services is a priority and is key to building resilience and contributing to environmental sustainability. Climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable health care facilities contribute to higher quality of care and improved service accessibility, with reduced facility costs leading to better affordability. Such facilities are, therefore, an important component in achieving universal health coverage.

Ministries of health in 11 countries and territories (Bahrain, Egypt, Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Morocco, occupied Palestinian territory, Oman, Pakistan, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen) have announced their commitment to make their health systems and facilities both climate resilient and environmentally sustainable. More countries are expected to announce similar commitments which will enhance the capacity of health care systems and facilities in the Region to protect and improve the health of communities in an unstable and changing world.

Expected outcomes

- Discussion of a regional framework based on WHO guidance intended to enable health care facilities to become climate resilient and environmentally sustainable by optimizing the use of resources and minimizing the release of waste into the environment (5).
- Outlining of the additional COVID-19 environmental health burdens, describing current WASH and environmental management systems used in health care facilities, and summarizing evolving best practices and solutions for reducing the impact of pollution on human and environmental health (6).
- Highlighting ways of developing low-carbon and low-emission health care facilities and of sustaining an equitable, healthy and green recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Emphasizing the importance of issues such as ensuring clean and efficient energy supplies, water, sanitation and hygiene services, waste management, occupational safety and health, food safety, air quality and chemical safety in moving towards climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable health care facilities.

References

1. The Lancet Countdown on health and climate change. Tracking progress on health and climate change (<https://www.thelancet.com/countdown-health-climate/about>).
2. IPBES Workshop on biodiversity and pandemics. Workshop report. Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services; 2020 (https://ipbes.net/sites/default/files/2020-12/IPBES%20Workshop%20on%20Biodiversity%20and%20Pandemics%20Report_0.pdf).
3. Preventing disease through healthy environments: a global assessment of the burden of disease from environmental risks. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2016 (<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241565196>).
4. Al-Yousfi AB, Malkawi M. Overview of the environmental health situation in the Arab Region. In: Health and the environment in Arab countries. Eds. Saab N, Habib RR. Arab Forum for Environment and Development; 2020.

5. WHO guidance for climate-resilient and environmentally sustainable health care facilities. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2020 (<https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/335909>).
6. Al-Emam R, Al-Yousfi B. Waste management of used personal protective equipment during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. *East Mediterr Health J.* 2021;27(11):1034–5 (<https://applications.emro.who.int/EMHJ/V27/11/1020-3397-2021-2711-1034-1035-eng.pdf>)