

WHO's First Global Conference on Air Pollution and Health

Improving air quality, combatting climate change – saving lives



30 October - 1 November 2018
WHO Headquarters, Geneva, Switzerland

Organized in collaboration with UN Environment, World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the secretariat of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

Air pollution is a growing global challenge - but tackling the issue provides us with a unique opportunity to mitigate climate change, support sustainable urban and rural development and gender equity, reduce poverty, and improve our health and wellbeing.

Public health context

Some 92% of people worldwide breathe unhealthy air, resulting in about 6.5 million deaths annually. The World Health Assembly has mandated WHO to take a leading role in combating what is now one of the world's most significant causes of premature death. According to the latest trends:

- **Ambient air quality** in most cities exceeds recommended WHO levels, in some cities by a factor of >10.
- **Household air pollution** is a leading killer in rural and urban homes. Nearly half of the world's population still uses polluting fuels and technologies to meet their most basic household energy needs.
- **Non communicable diseases (NCDs)** – Up to 1/3 of deaths from the leading NCDs (stroke, lung cancer, heart attacks and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease) are due to air pollution. Health impacts are largest among women, children, older people and the poor.
- **Climate Change** – Many mitigation strategies also reduce air pollution. Conversely, reducing air pollution can curb emissions of short-lived climate pollutants (SLCPs) as well as long-lived CO₂, slowing the pace of climate change and related impacts on water resources, agriculture, weather extremes and health.
- **Affordable strategies exist** to reduce air pollution emissions from transport, energy, agriculture, waste, housing and industrial sectors, resulting in massive public health benefits.
- **Air pollution strategies can also reduce public health risks** from traffic injury, obesity, and noise. Clean urban mobility and household energy, as well as improved workplace air quality improve social equity. Healthcare savings and improved worker productivity benefit local economies.

Political context

While there is no international convention on air pollution, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set clear targets for reducing air pollution and its health impacts from household, urban, regional and transboundary sources (SDGs 3-Health, 7-Energy, 11-Sustainable Cities).

Tackling Climate Change and Air Pollution is one of WHO's top five global priorities for 2019-2023. World Health Assembly (WHA 2015) Resolution on *Air Pollution and Health*



and subsequent *Road Map for an Enhanced Global Response* (WHA 2016) set forth a strategy for reducing air pollution health risks, including actions that mitigate climate change.

In December 2017, the UN Environment Assembly (UNEA) adopted the resolution *Preventing and Reducing Air Pollution to Improve Air Quality Globally* urging member state actions and increased awareness raising about the negative impacts of pollution as well as economic benefits of taking action.

The Paris Agreement of 2015 highlights the importance of climate mitigation strategies that yield “co-benefits for adaptation, health and sustainable development.” By recognizing that health is at the core of climate actions, implementation can be accelerated and immediate health co-benefits from air pollution reductions obtained.

This First Global Conference on Air Pollution and Health responds to the international mandates above and to Member States’ call to WHO to display leadership, foster partnerships and amplify advocacy.

Conference aims and outcomes

The conference will bring together global, national and local partners to share knowledge and mobilize action for cleaner air and better health globally. The conference will update the evidence on the health impacts of air pollution; methods of monitoring pollution and health exposures; and tools for assessing and implementing effective interventions. It will support strong health sector leadership for change, in partnership with other sectors. Cities and countries will be invited to join the *BreatheLife* campaign and commit to reducing air pollution by 2030 in line with WHO Air Quality Guidelines. Global attainment of the air quality guideline levels indoor and outdoor could prevent millions of deaths every year.

Participants will include: Ministers of Health, Ministers of Environment and other national government representatives; representatives of intergovernmental agencies, health professionals, other sectors (e.g. transport, energy, etc.), as well as from research, academia and civil society. The conference will also advance collaborations between WHO and sister UN agencies.

A broad and inclusive process will be conducted ahead of the conference, where experts and representatives from relevant organizations and agencies will be consulted on the conference objectives and how they can contribute to the event. This process will support the following conference outcomes:

- **A “Call for Urgent Action” by health and other sectors** to reduce the 6.5 million deaths a year due to air pollution as a contribution to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals 3, 7, 11 and 13.
- **Raising the level of ambition - agreement to develop a “Global Movement for Clean Air”** with commitments by ministers, mayors, intergovernmental organizations and non-state actors for reaching air quality levels in line with WHO AQ Guidelines by 2030.
- **Household energy on the top of the global energy agenda** – strengthening partnerships between the health and energy sectors and increasing efforts to reduce indoor air pollution.
- **Reducing the global epidemic of NCDs** with air pollution reductions as a key pillar of action.
- **The health sector’s unique leadership role** – to assess air pollution’s health and economic impacts and catalyse actions that reduce air pollution in cooperation with other sectors.
- **Action with multiple benefits** - air pollution reduction as a leading entry point for accelerating climate change mitigation and reducing climate-related health risks.
- **Updated evidence on health impacts of air pollution**, acute episodes along with new tools for estimating impacts and related cost and benefits for improving air quality.
- **Scaling up the global communications campaign *BreatheLife*** with new city and national commitments to the campaign, to progress towards WHO Air Quality Guidelines.

Conference sessions & activities

The conference will feature a range of sessions, workshops, events and activities focusing on the following areas and themes:

Science and Evidence

- Health effects from air pollution: new developments in the evidence on chronic and acute exposures, special exposures to sand and dust, etc.
- Air pollution monitoring, modelling, evaluation and forecasting for exposure estimates, including use of low cost monitors.
- Tracking and reporting on air pollution, energy and climate indicators for SDGs 3, 7, 11 and 13.
- WHO Air Quality Guidelines: status report on the update and work in progress.
- The Global Platform on Air Quality & Health: addressing key knowledge and research gaps.

Methods and Tools for Informed Decisions

- Methods and tools for the estimation of air pollution burden and impacts on health.
- Tools for assessing health impacts of air pollution at local level, and planning healthier transport, energy and waste scenarios, at local and national level, *inter alia* developed under the [Urban Health Initiative](#).
- Tools for assessing, costing and reducing household air pollution and its health impacts.

Strategies and Interventions

- Concerted action by mayors to improve urban air quality and ensure health benefits in cities around the world, e.g. upscaling the Urban Health Initiative.
- Cross-sector collaborations between energy, transport, agriculture and health to reduce air pollution and mitigate climate change while delivering health benefits.
- A health sector action agenda for clean air and prevention – the role of public health, health systems and of health care delivery and clinical practitioners.
- Making air pollution reduction a main strategy to reduce the global NCD epidemic.
- Expanding the global BreatheLife Campaign [BreatheLife2030.org](#) - led by WHO, UN Environment and the Climate and Clean Air Coalition.
- Financing-, funding- and economic incentive mechanisms to ensure enhanced action.



Partnerships and Advocacy

- Taking forward collaboration with UN agencies, including UN Environment and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), other Intergovernmental Organizations, Multilateral Development Banks, UNECE and other UN Regional Commissions.
- Strengthening cooperation within the Climate and Clean Air Coalition – planning actions, initiatives and ways to achieve policy changes to improve air quality and slow climate change.
- Moving forward collaboration with relevant scientific societies, public health federations & associations
- Strategic cooperation with think tanks, philanthropy and civil society (e.g. grassroots organizations, student groups, professional and medical societies, clean air citizens groups, etc.).
- Cooperation with cities and with key economic sectors including energy and transport.

Conference organization

The conference will be organized at WHO Headquarters in Geneva, in collaboration with UN Environment, World Meteorological Organization and the secretariat of the UNFCCC. The venue has a capacity for 400 participants. Invitations will be issued in the first quarter of 2018. Remote participation will be facilitated by webcasting and live streaming of the sessions. For more information contact: ambientair@who.int.