

# Children's Health and Environment

Instructions for the use of  
the WHO Training package  
for the health sector



**Interventions for Healthy Environments**  
**Public Health and Environment**  
**World Health Organization**

<https://www.who.int/health-topics/children-environmental-health>

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## Preamble

The environment in which children live, grow, play and learn has an impact on their health. Numerous health and development problems can be attributed to exposure to contaminated water, poor sanitation, household and ambient pollution and disease vectors. New emerging problems may also arise as children are exposed to untested chemicals in new products, or as they are exposed to problems linked to urbanization trends and global climate change. WHO estimated in 2012 that 26% of the global burden of disease attributed to environmental threats falls on children under five years of age.

Health professionals are in a key position to identify children at risk and take action. Front line health care professionals should be equipped to recognize and assess children's surroundings in order to uncover potential physical, chemical and biological hazards. They should provide guidance to patients and communities on how to reduce exposures and promote healthy environments for healthy children.

Paediatricians, family doctors, nurses, primary health care workers and other health care professionals should be trained on the relationships between children's health and the environment through the use of harmonized training materials, adaptable to the specific needs of countries and professional groups.

## Background

A growing body of evidence shows that environmental risk factors have an impact on the health and development of children and on their future. In response to the training and information needs expressed by countries and NGOs, WHO has developed materials to be used by the health and environment sectors in order to build their capacities in the area of children's health and the environment.

- The Bangkok Statement (March 2002, Bangkok, Thailand) issued by participants at the First WHO International Conference on CEH urges WHO to *promote the recognition, assessment and study of environmental factors that have an impact on the health and development of children. More specifically, to incorporate children's environmental health into the training of health care professionals and to promote the use of the Paediatric Environmental History* (Area 2: Health and Research).
- At the IFCS Forum IV meeting (November 2003, Bangkok, Thailand) participants recognized that children represent the future of our societies, that they require safe environments in order to reach their full potential as individuals and contributing members of these societies, and that different sectors in society should be informed and trained on the recognition of the adverse effects posed by chemicals.
- The Children's Health and Environment Action Plan for Europe (CEHAPE) approved by European Ministers of Health and Environment in June 2004 asks for collaboration to ensure its implementation by developing and providing training opportunities and materials and promoting the incorporation of child health and environment issues in the training curricula of child and adolescent health professionals.
- At the Second WHO/PAHO International Conference on Environmental Threats to the Health of Children: Increasing Knowledge and Taking Action (November 2005, Buenos Aires, Argentina), a *Commitment for Action* was issued, through which the participants of the conference agreed to promote the development of environmental paediatrics, and risk assessment methods that take account of children as a special risk group.

- At the Third WHO International Conference on Children's Health and the Environment in Busan, Republic of Korea (June 2009), the "Busan Pledge" called for action to address children's environmental health and asked WHO to facilitate the development of a global plan of action to improve children's environmental health and regularly monitor and report on its progress.
- In 2015, WHO and partners emphasized that every child should survive, thrive and transform in their environment through the launch of the Global Strategy for Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health, 2016–2030. The strategy aims to achieve a world in which every woman, child and adolescent realizes their rights to health and well-being, social and economic opportunities and participation in shaping sustainable societies.

The "Training Package for the Health Sector" is a response to these and many other international recommendations and commitments. Efforts undertaken by WHO in close partnership with a team of experienced professionals from over 15 countries and organizations such as the International Pediatric Association and other NGOs have led to the development and preparation of the Training Package. The initial training package was made possible thanks to financial support provided by the United States Environment Protection Agency Office of Children's Health Protection, which also made available data, graphics and text for the modules; additional support was also provided by the UK Department of Health.

Updates for the current versions of the modules were made possible with financial support from the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety, Germany; WHO is grateful to the International Society of Doctors for the Environment for organizing the working meeting of the Training Package in 2016.

### **Why should the health care sector be trained in CEH?**

Trained and well-informed health care professionals will improve their capacity to diagnose, prevent and manage paediatric diseases linked to the environment. The specific benefits they will gain include:

- a) an increased understanding of both the beneficial and adverse influences of environmental factors on children's health, development and well-being
- b) the ability to recognize signs, symptoms and diseases linked to existing and emerging environmental risk factors
- c) the capacity to undertake a comprehensive Paediatric Environmental History and to record, report and publish the cases and experiences collected
- d) the ability to identify knowledge gaps and to plan and undertake research activities to populate these
- e) knowledge on how to identify and access information sources on paediatric environmental threats and the environment (e.g. clinical, toxicological, environmental)
- f) proficiency to discuss environmental risks with patients, families, educators and the media, providing understandable, concise information about potential threats and risk-reduction strategies
- g) advocacy skills for approaching and sensitizing decision-makers about high priority issues requiring urgent action, including policy-making
- h) the capacity to further disseminate the information obtained and experience gained, through the implementation of training events in their own settings.

As a result, well-trained professionals will become "champions" on the protection of children's environmental health.

## Objectives

The training package aims to develop health care professionals as practitioners and decision-makers able to take action based on sound knowledge and good understanding of environmental influences on children's health. The modules are designed to train health care workers and enable them to teach others. Trained health care professionals will become leaders in promoting preventive actions and healthy environments for children.

Although the training package attempts to cover general issues that are applicable to different situations throughout the world, it is recommended that the modules be tailored to local situations and needs.

## Appendices

It is recommended to use the training modules in conjunction with the following tools (all are available from <https://www.who.int/teams/environment-climate-change-and-health/settings-populations/children/capacity-building/training-modules>):

- **Appendix 1:** Survey: Assessing Child Environmental Health awareness for Health Professionals
- **Appendix 2:** Model of Workshop Evaluation Form
- **Appendix 3:** Example of Post Workshop Knowledge Evaluation

## Using the training modules

The "Training package for the health sector" contains approximately 30 modules available as PDFs at <https://www.who.int/teams/environment-climate-change-and-health/settings-populations/children/capacity-building/training-modules> with modifiable PowerPoint versions available by request. The themes were selected by a working group of international experts on children's health and the environment and through consultation with different organizations. The modules address general environmental health issues, specific threats, health outcomes and actions.

- "Children are not little adults" and "Why children?" are general introductions to children's environmental health and should be the first modules presented. Then, present the technical modules that address the specific risks selected. Although modules complement one another, each module is self-contained and can be taught independently, as necessary.
- Each module contains a pool of 30 to 90 slides, from which presenters can select slides to include. It is very important to use only those slides that are relevant to the needs of the audience and to avoid using all the slides without prior preparation.
- Notes accompanying each slide clarify concepts and provides relevant complementary information and references. Disseminate the information provided in the notes section, but avoid reading the slides or notes verbatim, as this may prove to be too long and tiresome for the audience.
- Local references and information, pictures and statistics should be included in the presentations in order to address the specific issues in the area and the needs of the audience.
- Case studies are very useful in engaging the audience in thinking about specific environmental issues and the best ways to address them. Trainees should be encouraged to present case studies, discuss past experiences and review lessons learned.
- The trainer may follow the outline provided in the initial slides that announces the training objectives and use a number of slides selected from the available set. However, it is strongly

*Select only a few slides, with the most important information. Adapt them to the needs of the audience and highlight what may later on be addressed in the*

*Make sure photographs are regionally or country-appropriate.*

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