

ATLAS OF HEALTH AND CLIMATE



World Health
Organization



World
Meteorological
Organization

Weather · Climate · Water

ATLAS OF
HEALTH AND CLIMATE

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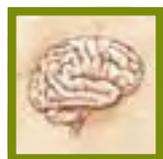
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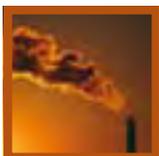
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PREFACE

ATLAS OF HEALTH AND CLIMATE: REALIZING THE POTENTIAL TO IMPROVE HEALTH OUTCOMES THROUGH THE USE OF CLIMATE SERVICES

Human health is profoundly affected by weather and climate. Extreme weather events kill tens of thousands of people every year and undermine the physical and psychological health of millions. Droughts directly affect nutrition and the incidence of diseases associated with malnutrition. Floods and cyclones can trigger outbreaks of infectious diseases and damage hospitals and other health infrastructure, overwhelming health services just when they are needed most.

Climate variability also has important consequences for health. It influences diseases such as diarrhoea and malaria, which kill millions annually and cause illness and suffering for hundreds of millions more. Long-term climate change threatens to exacerbate today's problems while undermining tomorrow's health systems, infrastructure, social protection systems, and supplies of food, water, and other ecosystem products and services that are vital for human health.

While the impact of climate change on health is felt globally, different countries experience these impacts to different degrees. Evidence shows that the most severe adverse effects tend to strike the poorest and most vulnerable populations. In addition, the adverse health impacts of climate are worsened by rapid and unplanned urbanization, the contamination of air and water, and other consequences of environmentally unsustainable development.

Concern about how a changing climate will affect health is reflected in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Global Framework for Climate Services. Countries have also recognized the need to protect health from climate-related risks through collaborative action on managing disaster risk, ensuring access to safe and adequate water and food, and strengthening preparedness, surveillance and response capacities needed for managing climate-sensitive diseases.

In order to achieve these goals, decision-makers at all levels need access to the most relevant and reliable information available on the diverse connections between climate and health. The World Health Organization and the World Meteorological Organization are working together to meet this need through a practical and innovative approach that uses climate services to strengthen the climate resilience of health systems and support proactive decision-making. These climate services will contribute to protecting public health and achieving better health outcomes.

The Atlas of Health and Climate is a product of this unique collaboration between the meteorological and public health communities. It provides sound scientific information on the connections between weather and climate and major health challenges. These range from diseases of poverty to emergencies arising from extreme weather events and disease outbreaks. They also include

environmental degradation, the increasing prevalence of noncommunicable diseases and the universal trend of demographic ageing.

The Atlas conveys three key messages. First, climate affects the geographical and temporal distribution of large burdens of disease and poses important threats to health security, on time scales from hours to centuries. Second, the relationship between health and climate is influenced by many other types of vulnerability, including the physiology and behaviour of individuals, the environmental and socio-economic conditions of populations, and the coverage and effectiveness of health programmes. Third,

climate information is now being used to protect health through risk reduction, preparedness and response over various spatial and temporal scales and in both affluent and developing countries.

It is our hope that the Atlas of Health and Climate will serve as a visual “call to action” by illustrating not only the scale of challenges already confronting us – and certain to grow more acute – but also by demonstrating how we can work together to apply science and evidence to lessen the adverse impacts of weather and climate and to build more climate-resilient health systems and communities.



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Geneva,
October 2012



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