



Children's  
Environmental Health  
Collaborative



# The Children's Environmental Health Collaborative

**More than ONE MILLION children under the age of 5 die every year due to unhealthy environments.**

The health, development, and well-being of many more children, including adolescents, is harmed by exposure to dangerous combinations of climate and environmental shocks.

UNICEF is building the **Children's Environmental Health Collaborative** to mobilize international action to protect child health and development from the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation.

The new Collaborative will spotlight the major risks children face and it will engage stakeholders to address these challenges. The Collaborative will host forums and a central hub for exchanging technical resources, experiences, and good practices.

Membership is open to governments and international organizations, including the private sector and civil society.



# Progress on child health and development is under threat

The tremendous gains in child survival over the past 30 years are threatened by climate change and environmental degradation. Patterns of disease among children are changing and children face multiple overlapping risks from climate change, air pollution, exposure to toxic chemicals and waste, unsafe built environments and antimicrobial resistance.

The Collaborative will draw attention to these overlapping environmental risks, starting with extreme heat, air pollution and lead poisoning.

  
**820** million children

(More than 1 in 3 globally) are exposed to **heatwaves**.

  
**2** billion children

Almost all children globally breathe air exceeding World Health Organization guideline limits, containing high levels of **pollutants**.

  
**815** million children

(More than 1 in 3 globally) are exposed to dangerous levels of **lead** from air, water, soil and food.

## Children are uniquely vulnerable to environmental risks, including the impacts of climate change

- Children breathe more rapidly than adults while their bodies are still developing, putting them at greater risk of absorbing more pollutants.
- Children are less able than adults to regulate their body temperatures when faced with heat extremes.
- Children's immune systems are not fully developed. Therefore, they may be unable to fight infections effectively. Their detox mechanisms are still immature, and they sometimes absorb more toxicants than adults.
- Children develop rapidly in-utero and in early childhood. They eat and drink more than adults compared to their body mass, making them more susceptible to environmental hazards.
- Child-specific behaviours such as hand-to-mouth put them at-risk of diverse exposures.

### Watch video:

Every child has the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment



### Watch video:

This is why extreme heat is life-threatening for children





**Watch video:**  
Preventing and addressing lead poisoning in Ghana



## Children most at-risk are the most vulnerable

Children who live in the poorest communities and those affected by conflict are the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and our degrading environment. In fact, nearly 92 per cent of pollution-related deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries, with children being the most affected. These children are the most at-risk when climate-driven disasters strike, or because they live in slums, informal settlements or near industrial areas, or are working in toxic dumpsites and hazardous agricultural or mining operations.



## Our aims

The Children's Environmental Health Collaborative aims to mobilize international action to protect child health and development from the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation by:



**Advocating for change** so that children's environmental health is a priority at national and global levels, unlocking action, resources and accountability.



**Brokering knowledge** by sharing data, resources, tools and educational materials for evidence-based action.



**Catalysing action** by bridging the gap between knowledge and action through global forums and country-led action.

## By 2026, the Collaborative will help UNICEF and partners in:

- Advancing the five key actions with governments in 50 low- and middle-income countries to protect children from environmental risks.
- Reaching 30 million caregivers with campaigns to help them recognize, prevent and manage environmental health exposures.
- Training 100,000 health workers on how to recognize and manage environmental risks.
- Engaging teachers and caregivers in 25,000 schools and early childhood centers on actions they can take to reduce environmental risks.

### Watch video:

Climate change and malaria:  
How UNICEF is supporting  
climate adaptation



# The five actions at the country level include:



## Evidence

Conduct national assessments and monitor children's environmental health (with due attention to age, gender, geography) to identify areas of concern.

**For example,** [Cambodia](#) conducted its first children's environmental health assessment and identified important risks and urgent collective action.



## Priority actions

Set national targets and integrate child-specific interventions in health and environment related policies with the involvement of young people.

**For example,** [Bangladesh](#) included children's environmental health and lead poisoning issues in the Directorate General of Health Service Operational Plans of the 5th Health Population and Nutrition Sector programme.



## Regulations and standards

Adopt and enforce public health, environmental, climate and labour laws, regulations and standards to ensure healthy environments.

**For example,** [Georgia](#) developed a 10-year strategy for tackling the country's lead problem and rolled out new regulations and stricter construction standards. Georgia is setting up its [lead surveillance system](#) using a new technology for blood collection.



## Capacity

Establish roles and responsibilities for children's environmental health; and develop sectoral capacities to deliver on their environmental health mandates.

**For example,** [Bangladesh](#), [Ghana](#) and [Indonesia](#) developed training courses on children's environmental health issues to raise awareness among health care providers.



## Engagement

Engage communities, frontline service providers and local governments on reducing environmental risks and their impact on children's health, development and well-being.

**For example,** [Belize](#) developed communication materials (in English, Spanish and Creole) on environmental health issues, including heat, medical waste and toxic chemicals to share on the media platforms of UNICEF, the Ministry of Health and the Environmental Health Department of the Ministry of Sustainable Development.





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**Do you want to join  
the Collaborative?**

Governments, the international private sector and civil society organizations who wish to become partners of the Collaborative should send an email to [ceh@unicef.org](mailto:ceh@unicef.org).