LANCET COUNTDOWN: TRACKING PROGRESS ON HEALTH AND CLIMATE CHANGE

In collaboration with Wellcome

A decade tracking progress on health and climate change

THE 2026 REPORT OF THE LANCET COUNTDOWN ON HEALTH AND CLIMATE CHANGE:

A DECADE OF ESCALATING HEALTH HARMS AND A DECISIVE MOMENT FOR ALL

SUMMARY FOR HEALTHCARE AND PUBLIC HEALTH PROFESSIONALS



A decade after the Paris Agreement entered into force, the 2026 Report of the Lancet Countdown documents growing threats to health from climate change. It also identifies opportunities to protect and improve health through climate action.

Healthcare and public health professionals are trusted voices on health, with the ability to inform public understanding and influence decisions that affect health. Through patient care, disease prevention, sustainable quality healthcare, public communication and policy engagement, they can help protect populations from climate-related risks and advance health-centred climate action.

KEY MESSAGES

Climate change is increasingly leading to adverse health outcomes in every country. Rising temperatures, extreme weather events, changing infectious disease risks and food insecurity are harming health worldwide. Several risks have increased more rapidly since 2016 than during the decade before, reflecting an acceleration of the impacts of climate change.

Climate change is exacerbating health inequities, and disproportionately affects most disadvantages communities. Disadvantaged populations often face greater health impacts, and have fewer resources to adapt and recover. Unequal access to clean energy, healthcare and protective infrastructure increases vulnerability.

Healthcare and public health systems remain insufficiently prepared. Progress in adaptation planning, surveillance and early warning systems remains uneven. Limited financing and workforce capacity continue to constrain action. Healthcare is at threat, and the capacity of healthcare systems to protect populations is under threat.

Climate action can deliver major health benefits. Reducing reliance on polluting fuels, improving air quality, and promoting healthier diets and active travel can prevent disease and avoid premature deaths.

Healthcare and public health professionals can drive health-centred climate action. As trusted voices on health, they can raise awareness of climate-related risks, help raise awareness and knowledge of individual actions needed for health protection, communicate the health benefits of climate action and help shape policies that protect patients and communities.

1 GROWING THREATS TO POPULATION HEALTH

Climate change is increasingly affecting health and survival worldwide. Several climate-related risks have accelerated since the Paris Agreement entered into force, underscoring the health costs of rising greenhouse gas emissions, and increasing the need for prevention, preparedness, and strengthened healthcare provision.

Heat-related mortality is rising

Heat was associated with a record 710,000 estimated deaths globally in 2023, with 72% directly attributed to climate change (Indicator 1.1.5).

People experienced an average of 13.5 heatwave days in 2025, 83% of which would not have been expected without human-caused climate change (Indicator 1.1.1).

Infants, older adults, pregnant people and those with chronic health conditions are most at risk.

Extreme weather events threaten health and wellbeing

In 2025, 52% of global land area experienced at least one month of extreme drought, the second-highest level recorded (Indicator 1.2.2), impacting crop production and access to safe drinking water.

Floods, storms and wildfires also threaten health through injuries, air pollution, unsafe water and disruption of essential services.

Climate change is altering infectious disease risks

Dengue transmission suitability increased substantially, with suitability (R_0) for *Aedes albopictus* rising by 24% and for *Aedes aegypti* by 7% between 1981-1990 and 2016-2025 (Indicator 1.3.1).

In addition, a record 1.72 billion people were living within 100 km of coastal waters environmentally suitable for non-toxigenic Vibrio transmission in 2025 (Indicator 1.3.2).

Climate hazards are exacerbating food insecurity

An estimated 128 million additional people experienced moderate or severe food insecurity due to the higher frequency of heatwave days and drought months in 2024 compared with 1981–2010 (Indicator 1.4).

These hazards can occur together and compound their health impacts. They increase the need for disease prevention, environmental health monitoring, surveillance and emergency preparedness.

2 CLIMATE CHANGE IS EXACERBATING HEALTH INEQUITIES

Populations with the fewest resources to adapt often face disproportionate health impacts, and climate change is amplifying existing health inequities.

Heat-related health impacts are unequally distributed

During 2016–2023, an annual average of 370,000 heat-related deaths were attributed to human-caused climate change (Indicator 1.1.5).

The health impacts of climate change are unequally distributed, often placing the greatest burdens on populations that have contributed the least to greenhouse gas emissions and have fewer resources to adapt. For instance, 91% of heat-related deaths in Africa were attributed to climate change, compared to 75% in Europe (Indicator 1.1.5).

Heat exposure threatens livelihoods and wellbeing

In 2025, heat exposure caused the loss of 573 billion potential work hours globally. Associated income losses were equivalent to 5% of GDP in Low-HDI countries, compared with 0.5% in Very High-HDI countries (Indicators 1.1.3 and 4.1.3).

Public health interventions must prioritise populations facing greater exposure and limited access to protection. This includes people experiencing energy poverty, insecure housing, unsafe working conditions and limited access to healthcare.

3 STRENGTHENING PUBLIC HEALTH PROTECTION AND CLIMATE-RESILIENT HEALTH SYSTEMS

Healthcare professionals are at the frontline of the health impacts of climate change. As trusted voices, they can help inform public policies, and help patients reduce their individual health risks. Health systems must be able to anticipate, prevent and respond to climate-related health risks. However, adaptation remains uneven and insufficient.

In 2025, only 24% of WHO Member States reported completing a climate change Vulnerability and Adaptation assessment since 2020, while 29% reported having developed a Health National Adaptation Plan (Indicators 2.1.1 and 2.1.2). Limited finance and human resources were the main barriers to implementation.

Climate-informed surveillance and early warning systems are essential

In 2025, 66% of the 145 WHO Member States responding to the WHO Health and Climate Change Global Survey, reported having at least one health surveillance system incorporating climate information. These included systems for vector-borne diseases, heat-related illness and mortality, infectious diseases, and waterborne diseases.

Among responding Member States, 52% reported having a climate-informed Health Early Warning System for at least one health risk (Indicator 2.2.1).

Early warning systems can support public health protection

During 2016–2025, the increase in people affected per event during floods and storms was 9% lower in countries with Health Early Warning Systems than in those without them (Indicator 2.3.2).

Warnings need to be linked to community outreach, anticipatory action and emergency response.

Health workforce training remains limited

In 2025, only 39% of 638 surveyed nursing schools offered some climate and health education. Only 28% made this education mandatory (Indicator 2.2.5).

Healthcare professionals are essential players

Within their everyday practice, they can identify vulnerable patients, build awareness of the climate risks they patients are exposed to, and adapt healthcare to the changing climate risks.

They can also empower patients with knowledge and tools to better understand their own vulnerabilities protect themselves in the face of health hazards, with consideration of their particular underlying health conditions and risk factors– essential to ensure patients and their carers can uptake protective behaviour, adequately respond to health warnings, and reduce their individual risk.

Strengthening resilience requires climate-informed surveillance, environmental health monitoring, community-based early warning and response, workforce training and reliable health infrastructure. It also requires healthcare professionals to be equipped with the right knowledge to support patients in reducing their own risk, adapt their care, and uptake protective measures.

4 DELIVERING THE PUBLIC HEALTH BENEFITS OF CLIMATE ACTION

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions can also improve population health. Moving away from polluting fuels, decarbonising transport, and promoting healthier diets can reduce disease and premature mortality. Healthcare professionals can be key voices in advocating for these health-protective interventions.

Reducing fossil fuel-derived air pollution can save lives

In 2023, ambient $PM_{2.5}$ from fossil fuel combustion caused 2.78 million deaths globally (Indicator 3.2.1).

Between 2016 and 2023, 54% of the 140 countries assessed reduced deaths from fossil fuel-derived $PM_{2.5}$, collectively avoiding 323,000 deaths annually. However, global deaths remained almost unchanged.

Clean household energy can reduce air pollution and inequities

Globally, 2.1 billion people still rely on polluting fuels and technologies for household energy. Across the 65 countries studied, deaths from household air pollution due to solid fuel use declined from 2.4 million in 2016 to 2.0 million in 2023 (Indicator 3.2.2).

Low-HDI countries, however, experienced an increase in deaths. In 2023, 88% of household energy in Low Human Development Index (HDI) countries came from polluting biomass, while electricity accounted for only 5% (Indicator 3.1.2).

Across the 65 countries studied, household air pollution from solid fuels caused an estimated two million deaths in 2023 (Indicator 3.2.2).

Healthier food and transport systems offer further benefits

In 2023, unhealthy diets contributed to an estimated 10.5 million deaths globally (Indicator 3.3.2).

Nutritious, predominantly plant-based diets, safe active travel, and affordable zero-emission public transport can reduce emissions while improving population health.

Public health professionals can help shape and evaluate policies on air quality, clean energy, healthy food environments, and sustainable transport. Health benefits should be central to the design and evaluation of climate action.

5 REDUCING HEALTHCARE'S CONTRIBUTION TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Healthcare systems both protect health and contribute to greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution. To deliver healthcare without simultaneously causing health harms, health systems must address their own environmental damage through activities that simultaneously improve care quality. Since 2016, global healthcare-related greenhouse gas emissions increased by 26%, or 17% per capita (Indicator 3.5.1). Supply chains accounted for 64–99% of healthcare emissions in every country except South Africa.

As of May 2026, only around 7% of countries studied had published health system carbon footprint assessments meeting all WHO quality criteria. Among the world's largest corporate suppliers of health-related products, only 23% met minimum quality thresholds for emissions reporting and commitments (Indicator 3.5.2).

Reducing healthcare emissions requires action on energy use, facilities, medical products and supply chains. Much of this can be achieved through shifts towards better pathways of care, and swaps in the use of healthcare supplies towards lower-carbon alternatives with equal healthcare outcomes. The newly-launched Lancet MedZero database is an useful resource for healthcare professionals to make informed decision about low-carbon alternatives to provide quality care.

PRIORITIES FOR HEALTHCARE AND PUBLIC HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Protect patients and populations from climate-related health risks. Integrate climate risks into clinical care, disease prevention and public health programmes. Design and validate interventions and prescription of health-protective actions, raising awareness of vulnerabilities and risks, and empowering patients in pursuing behaviours that minimise risks.

Support and promote the provision of climate education for healthcare and public health professionals. Advocate and advance the provision of climate education within title-granting health education bodies and health accreditation. Support and provide continuing professional education to ensure all healthcare professionals have the necessary tools and resources to respond to, and minimise, climate change risks to health.

Strengthen public health surveillance and early warning systems. Integrate climate, environmental and health data to identify risks. Link early warnings to community outreach, preventive measures and timely responses, with tailored outreach to vulnerable populations.

Build climate-resilient healthcare and public health systems. Support vulnerability assessments, adaptation planning, and emergency preparedness. Safeguard essential health services during climate-related emergencies.

Reduce healthcare emissions. Support low-carbon healthcare through renewable energy, sustainable procurement and emissions monitoring, and by prioritising preventative care pathways that improve health outcomes while minimising the environmental footprint of healthcare.

Put health at the centre of climate decision-making. Engage with communities, decision-makers and professional organisations to put health, equity and wellbeing at the centre of climate policies. As trusted voices, healthcare and public health professionals can communicate evidence on the health risks of climate change and the benefits of action.

The Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change is a global collaboration of world-leading scientists from UN agencies and academic institutions worldwide. This document summarises the main findings of the 2026 Global Report of the Lancet Countdown. The indicators to which the data presented correspond are marked between parenthesis. These data can be further explored in the report, or in the online data explorer. Further information for policy makers can be accessed at www.lancetcountdown.org/country-resources/.

The Lancet Countdown produces annual data-focused reports, assessing the latest state of the health threats and impacts of climate change, and the health benefits (or, more frequently, missed opportunities) from the current response to climate change. Progress is measured through 54 indicators on health and climate change – each acting as a single metric capturing an aspect of that relationship across time - which together paint a comprehensive picture of the state of health and climate change.

Romanello M, Walawender M, Israelsson J et al. The 2026 report of the Lancet Countdown on health and climate change: A decade of escalating health harms and a decisive moment for all. The Lancet 2026; published online October 2026. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(26)01779-4