The Weekly
Information Resource Bulletin

FOCUS: Climate Change

Climate change occurs in different ways, ranging from increased climate variability and gradual changes in temperature and precipitation, to increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events.

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), climate change is a significant and emerging threat to public health, and it changes the way we must look at protecting vulnerable populations.

WHO estimates that nearly 90 percent of the diseases caused by climate change happen to children under the age of five years old.

If the intensity and frequency of weather extremes continue to increase, it will result in more child illnesses and death as a result of heat waves, floods, storms and droughts.

The illnesses triggered by climate change that often affect children are diarrhea and other water borne diseases.

The goals of the Weekly Bulletin are:

- To give the participating journalists guidance and tips on their reporting on climate and children's health
- To help journalists discuss with their listeners the effects of climate change on children's health
- To help journalists engage their communities in the search for solutions to protecting children from climate change effects

The Problem: Climate Change Effects on Children's Health

Children are mainly prone to the negative effects of climate change. They suffer around 90% of the disease burden from climate change. (Climate and Health Alliance)

Climate change may increase the risk of some infectious diseases, particularly those that appear in warm areas and are spread by mosquitoes and other insects.

As was discussed a few weeks ago in the malaria bulletin, an increase in temperature raises the malaria parasite's (plasmodium) reproductive rate. More mosquitoes often means more malaria and children under the age of five are the ones that suffer most from malaria.

Climate change is increasingly putting children all over the world at risk – particularly in the most vulnerable countries such as Malawi.

Climate change is also indirectly affecting children's health, in a way that changing rainfall patterns is limiting crop production in sub-Saharan Africa which in turn is leading to increased malnutrition in children.

Malnutrition and infectious disease, brought on by climate change, represent the biggest threats to children.

Children are more vulnerable than adults to famine and nutritional deprivation since they require three to four times the amount of food on a body weight basis than adults. It is estimated that by 2050, 25 million children will be malnourished due to climate change effects, according to WHO.

WHO also found out that exposure to air pollution in childhood can result in the reduction in lung function, an increase in chronic respiratory illness and a greater vulnerability to cardiovascular disease in adulthood.

Activities for Journalists

Use your radio station to help your community understand how climate change is affecting the health of children and what communities can do to protect their children.

What is the effect of climate change on health? Climate change affects the social and environmental factors of health: clean air, safe drinking water, sufficient food and secure shelter.

Many of the major killers such as diarrheal diseases, malnutrition and malaria are highly climate-sensitive and are expected to worsen as the climate changes. Note that children are more vulnerable to these diseases.

WHO estimates that 88 percent of climate-change-related illnesses and injuries occur in children under the age of five. Infants and young children are particularly vulnerable to heat waves because their immature regulatory systems make them more susceptible to heat stress, kidney disease and respiratory illnesses.

Higher temperatures due to climate change accelerate the formation of ground-level ozone- a powerful lung irritant, which may cause serious health problems in children.

Ozone high in our atmosphere protects us from harmful ultraviolet radiation. However, at ground level, inhaling ozone harms the lungs.

Ozone is produced when several chemical byproducts of burning fossil fuels are exposed to sunlight. More ozone tends to get produced when temperatures are higher. This strong air pollutant is a known cause of asthma attacks in children as well as breathing troubles for adults with chronic lung diseases.

Check with the local health clinic on the rate of malaria and water-borne diseases – particularly among children. Is the rate going up? Ask the health official to discuss the causes? What can be done to reduce the risk?

Interview an environmentalist about climate changes in your community. How does he/she see these changes affecting your community? What can be done to slow the effects of climate change?

Work with local environmental groups to help launch an awareness campaign throughout your listening area. Perhaps a local NGO could sponsor an activity – such as helping remove standing water sites – where mosquitoes breed.

Useful Contacts

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