

Global experts launch Lancet Countdown in response to climate change health crisis

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The Lancet Countdown: Tracking Progress on Health and Climate Change is being launched today (Monday 14th Nov) at the COP22 climate talks taking place in Morocco. An international, multi-disciplinary research initiative, it brings together leading experts to track and analyse the impacts of climate change on public health.

The Lancet Countdown will report annually in *The Lancet*. With input from 48 leading experts from across the world, some 16 institutions are academic partners of the initiative, including University College London, Tsinghua University and the Centre for Climate & Security among others. The Lancet Countdown is engaged in a special collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) to promote synergies, collaborate on data sources, and ensure strong engagement with Ministries of Health.

With the aim of ensuring the case for action on health and [climate change](#) is more widely evidenced and understood, the Lancet Countdown will inform decision-making and drive an accelerated policy response to climate change. It will complement other initiatives, such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and its achievements for [climate science](#).

Patricia Espinosa, Executive Secretary, UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, said: "The health impacts of climate change are already being felt and effecting some of the most vulnerable on our planet. No one is immune or out of reach. Climate action, spearheaded by

governments and supported by business, cities, investors and citizens - including [health care professionals](#) - goes hand-in-hand with delivering a better quality of life in its own right and as a key pillar of the Sustainable Development Goals."

The interrelation of climate change and public health is becoming increasingly clear. The Lancet Countdown builds on the findings of the 2015 Lancet Commission on Health and Climate Change, which concluded that climate change posed both a "potentially catastrophic risk to human health", while conversely being "the greatest global health opportunity of the 21st century" if the right steps are taken.

Dr Richard Horton, Editor-in-Chief of *The Lancet* said: "One challenge of the ongoing global climate crisis is to convey the urgency of our collective predicament and the need for decisive action. The Lancet Countdown on Health and Climate Change is being launched today to amass the evidence needed to hold policy makers accountable for their promises and commitments. The research community can make an important contribution to heightening political awareness and accelerating progress to a healthier, low-carbon world. These are the goals of our Countdown on Health and Climate Change."

A broader evidence base on interrelated health and climate change trends will notably help demonstrate clear co-benefits of action. An estimated 18000 people die every day due to air pollution exposure, making it the world's largest single environmental health risk. The World Bank in turn estimates it costs the global economy US\$225 billion a year in related lost labour income. CO₂ and other green house gasses from road transport and fossil fuel energy generation responsible for the bulk of air pollution in the first place, are also a leading cause of climate change. Health and economic co-benefits from addressing climate change - be it mitigation or adaptation - only add to the impetus for action, given that changes to climate take longer to be felt.

The Lancet Countdown is partnering with the Wellcome Trust, which is committed to stimulating research on health and climate change. Dr Sarah Molton, lead for 'Our Planet, Our Health' at Wellcome, said: "The Paris Agreement is a step in the right direction, but we must build on this momentum. The Lancet Countdown is an important opportunity to ensure that evidence gets to those audiences that can bring about the changes in policy and practice that we need to protect the health of both humans and the planet."

The Lancet Countdown comes at a crucial time for international cooperation and national action on climate change, following ratification of the Paris Agreement and the announcement of the 2030 global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As part of this transition, healthcare professionals, governments and countries will have to shift from an understanding of climate change solely as a threat, to one which embraces the response to climate change as an opportunity for human health and wellbeing. The Lancet Countdown is aligned with the SGD process in working to ensure the health challenge posed by climate change is resolved by 2030.

Dr Diarmid Campbell-Lendrum, Head of the Health and Climate Change team at the World Health Organization, said: "The Paris Agreement was a landmark achievement - the challenge now is to meet the targets agreed by world leaders. The WHO is working directly with countries to provide evidence of the specific health risks that each of them faces, and the health opportunities of a resilient, low carbon future - as well as the support that they need to respond to this defining health issue of our time.

"The WHO is working with The Lancet Countdown to track progress, and to mobilize support for more ambitious action. When it comes to climate change, when the world drags its feet, the health of our patients all around the globe suffer."

The relationship between health and climate change, will be addressed by The Lancet Countdown through in-depth analysis across relevant themes in the context of global, regional, national, and city level trends. The scope of the research, analysis and basis for the creation of the initiative is outlined in detail in an accompanying paper published today in *The Lancet*. This provides more detail on the principle themes the Lancet Countdown will cover, namely: the health impacts of climate change; health resilience and adaptation; the [health](#) co-benefits of mitigation; finance and economics; and political and broader engagement.

Academics and policy experts are invited to join the Lancet Countdown, as it undertakes a three month public consultation process on the scope and focus of the initiative, with events planned in London, Marrakech, Lima, Kampala, Beijing and San Francisco.

More information: Nick Watts et al, The Lancet Countdown: tracking progress on health and climate change, *The Lancet* (2016). [DOI: 10.1016/S0140-6736\(16\)32124-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(16)32124-9)

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