

Protecting maternal, newborn
and child health from the
impacts of climate change

A call for action



National Midwife Day, 2nd May 2024

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A young person braves the drought in Shyamnagar Union, Bangladesh, trekking to a reservoir to collect water. Despite the passage of many years since Cyclone Aila, the community continues to endure the struggle for access to clean drinking water.

>> Climate change is one of the **gravest threats facing humanity**. **Pregnant women***, **newborns** and **children** face **distinct risks** from climate change-related **health impacts**, due to a host of **physiological, clinical, social and behavioural factors**.

>> Climate change is a **growing threat to maternal, newborn and child health** that can no longer be ignored. With **progress stalling** on many fronts, **immediate action** is needed to meet the **Sustainable Development Goals**, with a focus on women, newborns and children.

>> **Hard-won advances** of the past decades for maternal, newborn and child survival and well-being **must be protected** to ensure the right to health for all.



Known effects and impacts of climate change on health



Temperature extremes



Rising sea levels and salination



Floods and drought



Windstorms and wild fires



Ambient air pollution



Threats to livelihoods and human rights



Displacement and migration



Weakened health systems and infrastructure



Impacts on food and water systems



Infectious and vector-borne diseases



Exacerbation of social determinants and inequalities

- Available evidence suggests links between climate change and adverse health effects.
- Climate change:
 - Altering health conditions, e.g respiratory conditions
 - With rising temperatures, the geography and intensity of vector-borne disease are shifting and increasing.
 - Both too little water (due to drought) and too much water (due to flooding) impact agriculture, food security, housing and infrastructure, as well as safe access to clean water, sanitation and hygiene, and access to health services and information.
 - At its extreme, climate change can manifest as humanitarian crises, contributing to mass migration, accelerating population displacement.
- Need urgent action by stakeholders to invest and develop climate action plans for all individuals that focus on improving maternal, newborn and child health (MNCH) – now and in the long-term.

Climate risks to maternal, newborn and child health



Impacts on maternal and perinatal health

“ Extreme heat, are associated with increased risks of developing complications that lead to adverse maternal, perinatal and neonatal outcomes”

- Multiple causes of maternal and neonatal morbidity and mortality such as gestational diabetes, hypertensive disorders of pregnancy, preterm birth, low birth weight and stillbirth.
- Mental health and contribute to intergenerational trauma.
- Additional exposure to temperature extremes and vector-spread infectious disease (due to complex interplay of gender and social norm and roles within homes and community e.g collect water and cooking outdoor)
- Emergencies caused by climate change also put women and children at increase risk of violence.

Impacts on newborn, infant and children

- Their immature temperature regulation systems and their dependency on others for cooling, shading and feeding explain their increased vulnerability to climate change.
- Extreme heat and air pollution are associated with increased mortality and morbidity from stunting, respiratory diseases and adverse neurodevelopment outcomes.
- Increase rates of depression and post-trauma stress disorder in children, with potentially long-lasting mental health impact into adulthood.
- High temperatures can increase pathogens in water and food which can elevate risk for diarrhoeal disease.
- Food insecurity and other factors can increase risk of undernutrition.

Impacts on health system that support MNCH

- Affect community and functioning of health system
- Health workers may face challenges in providing care while managing personal safety.
- Families and communities can face barriers in accessing health services

A call for action

NOW!





The health of pregnant women, mothers, newborns and children reflects the stability and robustness of a community's resilience to potential health disruption.

The evidence linking global warming with adverse outcomes is mounting and is cause for alarm.

The 2015 Paris Agreement called “ for Parties taking action to address climate change to respect and promote the right to health”. Yet actions have thus far been insufficient.

Without delay, the following urgent actions must be taken to achieve a healthy, sustainable and equitable future for all.

>> Address the needs of women, newborns and children in the global climate response.

- Climate response policies should prioritize women, newborns and children. These policies need to recognize and address climate risks to health, including policies to reduce carbon emissions and protect health.
- The needs of women, newborns and children should be integrated into climate mitigation, adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies, to address their unique needs, including access to essential sexual, reproductive, maternal, newborn and child health services.

>> Frame climate change as a health and human rights issue with a human capital approach

- Considering the impact of intersectional factors such as gender, age, culture and equity when addressing the impact of climate change.
- By amplifying underrepresented voices and ensuring meaningful participation, gender responsive and equitable climate action leading to creative solutions that are context-appropriate and aim to ensure high-quality MNCH care that is available, accessible and acceptable to all in need.
- Consideration should be given to existing inequities in access to and quality of MNCH care. The needs of women, newborns, children and adolescents are essential in decision making, from local to national levels.

>> Institute robust monitoring frameworks.



- Strengthen existing monitoring frameworks and agree on indicators to track health outcomes with disaggregated, spatially-referenced population data, including location, characteristics and mobility of populations in areas exposed to current and projected climate hazards.
- This will improve the quality of services provided and help target resources to populations and areas with the most needs, as well as allow countries to track progress over time.

>> Accelerate research and share information on the impact of climate change and MNCH

- High-quality data are necessary to estimate the global burden of climate-related impacts on MNCH and quantify the strength of these associations. All actors should contribute to building knowledge on the effect of climate change on health risks for MNCH.
- Education on the concepts of climate change should be available for all individuals, at community level and within health worker training programmes. Understanding the effects of climate change on health will enhance willingness to act on climate change and to ensure that high-quality data are available to strengthen knowledge of its impacts.
- Research is also needed to identify the effectiveness of interventions to address these climate-related health outcomes, as well as to articulate the relationship between climate change, social determinants of health and their corresponding risks to MNCH.
- Understanding the context and conditions needed to implement effective interventions will be critical to scaling sustainable actions.

>> Strengthen resilient health systems sustainably

- Action is needed to reduce carbon emissions in the health sector to improve health. The health sector is responsible for up to 4.4% of all greenhouse gas emissions.
- Climate-resilient, low-carbon and environmentally sustainable health-care facilities protect MNCH from water scarcity and food insecurity, as well as unsafe structural environments.
- It is essential that climate and health programmes reflect the voices and needs of women, children, adolescents and youth, communities and health workers, with MNCH services integrated into ongoing activities to mitigate climate change.

A health sector that is fit for the future is able to increase the capacity for protecting health in an unstable and changing climate by building climate resilience and contributing to mitigation through reduced greenhouse gas emissions, becoming low-carbon or net-zero systems and reducing all other negative impacts on the environment.

>> Promote greater collaboration between sectors to jointly define long-term, sustainable policies that outline MNCH targets in climate financing policy.

- There is a need to strategically mobilize funds to enhance and expand the climate resilience of the health sector with specific allocation to MNCH needs.
- Investments in primary health care within universal health coverage are needed to ensure that MNCH services are available and affordable to all who need them.
- Multilateral climate funds and climate-related assistance can jointly promote MNCH goals, with a particular focus on distributional effects for the populations most affected by climate events.
- Similarly, financing mechanisms for MNCH can incorporate or improve service provision across multiple sectors, including financing global health-responsive climate action.

>> Prioritize an “all of society”, multisectoral approach to take sustained and impactful action on MNCH in the climate change response.

- Communities, social sectors, private sector actors and governments need to come together around shared goals and responsibilities to institute the necessary enabling environments to protect MNCH from the direct and indirect impacts of climate change.
- It is crucial to promote collective action outside the health sector, such as the energy, agriculture, housing, education and private sectors.

Every action will count.

Thanks you!