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ASPARTAME HAZARD AND RISK ASSESSMENT RESULTS RELEASED



Assessments of the health impacts of the non-sugar sweetener aspartame were released on 14 July 2023 by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives (JECFA). Citing “limited evidence” for carcinogenicity in humans, IARC classified aspartame as *possibly carcinogenic* to humans (IARC Group 2B) and JECFA reaffirmed the acceptable daily intake of 40 mg/kg body weight.

Aspartame is an artificial (chemical) sweetener widely used in various food and beverage products since the 1980s, including diet drinks, chewing gum, gelatin, ice cream, dairy products such as yogurt, breakfast cereal, toothpaste and medications such as cough drops and chewable vitamins.

“Cancer is one of the leading causes of death globally. Every year, 1 in 6 people die from cancer. Science is continuously expanding to assess the possible initiating or facilitating factors of cancer, in the hope of reducing these numbers and the human toll,” said Dr Francesco Branca, Director of the Department of Nutrition and Food Safety, WHO. *“The assessments of aspartame have indicated that, while safety is not a major concern at the doses which are commonly used, potential effects have been described that need to be investigated by more and better studies.”*

The two bodies conducted independent but complementary reviews to assess the potential carcinogenic hazard and other health risks associated with aspartame consumption. This was the first time that IARC has evaluated aspartame and the third time for JECFA.

After reviewing the available scientific literature, both evaluations noted limitations in the available evidence for cancer (and other health effects).

JECFA concluded that the data evaluated indicated no sufficient reason to change the previously [established acceptable daily intake \(ADI\) of 0-40 mg/kg body weight for aspartame](#). The committee therefore reaffirmed that it is safe for a person to consume within this limit per day.

IARC and WHO will continue to monitor new evidence and encourage independent research groups to develop further studies on the potential association between aspartame exposure and consumer health effects.

[Summary of findings of the evaluation of aspartame at the IARC Monographs Programme’s 134th Meeting, 6–13 June 2023 and Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives \(JECFA\) 96th meeting, 27 June–6 July 2023](#)

More on [World Health Organization \(WHO\) and the Food and Agriculture Organization \(FAO\) Joint Expert Committee on Food Additives \(JECFA\)](#)

More information can be found at: <https://www.who.int/news/item/14-07-2023-aspartame-hazard-and-risk-assessment-results-released>

STATEMENT – COUNTRIES MUST ACT TO PREVENT THE WORST IMPACTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON OUR HEALTH AND HEALTH SYSTEMS

Statement by WHO Regional Director for Europe, Dr Hans Henri P. Kluge, at the 7th Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in Budapest, Hungary



Welcome to the 7th Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, hosted by the Hungarian Government.

I warmly thank Hungary for its long and active history in this conference series, having already hosted the 4th Ministerial Conference in 2004. At that meeting, it was Hungary's foresight that resulted in the Children's Environment and Health Action Plan for Europe being agreed upon, paving the way to better protect younger generations.

Almost 20 years later, Budapest is again at the centre of the action, hosting 46 countries from Europe and central Asia, 30 ministers and state secretaries, and over 600 partners and civil society and youth organization representatives – all here to accelerate progress in addressing the existential threat posed by the triple environmental crisis of climate change, pollution and loss of biodiversity.

Why is this Conference so important?

Because an estimated 1.4 million people across the WHO European Region die every year from environmental risk factors; nearly half of these needless deaths can be attributed to air pollution alone.

Because last summer – the hottest ever recorded in Europe – over 20,000 people died due to extreme heat.

Because 77 million people in the Region still lack access to safely managed drinking water.

Because as a Region, we are moving far too slowly, severely jeopardizing our ability to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

Action needs to be taken by governments. Action needs to be taken by partners. Action needs to be taken by all of us as individuals.

It was truly inspiring to take part in a youth event yesterday. Young people represent a third of the population of the European Region, and I am committed to engaging with them on the inclusive, intersectoral and transformative actions that are needed for a healthy and sustainable recovery and a resilient future.

I look forward to the adoption of a Youth Declaration at this Conference, emphasizing that a clean and healthy environment is a basic human right.

There is a Hungarian saying: Aki mer, az nyer. He who dares, wins. If we do not try – or dare – we'll never succeed, because we will not have given ourselves the chance to do so in the first place. So, let us dare. Let us win. Together.

[https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/05-07-2023-statement---countries-must-act-to-prevent-the-worst-impacts-of-climate-change-on-our-health-and-health-systems.](https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/05-07-2023-statement---countries-must-act-to-prevent-the-worst-impacts-of-climate-change-on-our-health-and-health-systems)

CLEAN AIR + GREEN PLANET = GOOD HEALTH FOR ALL

Countries across Europe and central Asia take action to stop 1.4 million preventable deaths every year from climate change and pollution



Each year, across the 53-country WHO European Region, an estimated 1.4 million deaths are linked to environmental factors, such as pollution and climate change. During the first week of July, European ministers of environment and health committed to taking urgent actions to reduce that staggering toll and safeguarding our survival on this planet.

Countries meeting at the 7th Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, held in Budapest from 5-7 July 2023, adopted a declaration with a specific set of actions

to better prepare health systems to tackle the impact of climate change, reduce the health effects of pollution, and integrate nature and biodiversity considerations into environment and health policies, which means taking a holistic approach to human, animal and planetary health.

“Preventing well over a million deaths every year due to environmental risk factors is within our grasp, we know what to do, and now is the time to turn words into action,” said Dr Hans Henri P. Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe. *“Everyone has the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. Yet the triple environmental crisis – climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss – threatens our very existence and that of our planet, our home. The Budapest Declaration offers concrete actions to improve the environments people live in, decrease the disease burden, reduce health inequalities, relieve pressured health systems and enhance our collective resilience to future pandemics.”*

The new WHO report “A healthy environment in the WHO European Region: why it matters and what steps we can take to improve health” shows that air pollution, unsafe water, poor sanitation and hygiene, climate change and chemical pollution continue to pose a significant threat to health in the Region, with a disproportionate impact on the most vulnerable, including children, women, and elderly people. Environmental risks also contribute to a quarter of all noncommunicable diseases globally, including cancer, along with cardiovascular, respiratory, and mental diseases.

The full publication is available at: <https://www.who.int/europe/publications/i/item/WHO-EURO-2023-7588-47355-69518>.

More information is available at: <https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/05-07-2023-clean-air---green-planet---good-health-for-all>.

THE BUDAPEST DECLARATION: A KEY ROADMAP AND NEW PARTNERSHIPS TO ACHIEVE COMMITMENTS



Accelerating action for healthier people, a thriving planet, a sustainable future

The 7th Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health was convened in Budapest, Hungary, by WHO/Europe in collaboration with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

“We are living in an age of crises, when governments, professionals and citizens have to deal with health and humanitarian emergencies that often occur at the same time,” said Sándor Pintér, Hungary's Minister of the Interior. *“Hungary is committed to joint and forward-looking cooperation, since we can only find solutions to new global problems by thinking together. It is a great pleasure and honour for us to host this important event. Our domestic results are outstanding, so we are happy to share our knowledge and experience. The time for action has arrived, and Hungary will provide the platform for the initial steps in Budapest in the next three days. I am confident that by working together we can create a safer and healthier future!”*

Ministers at the conference adopted the Budapest Declaration, which will be submitted for endorsement during the 73rd meeting of the Regional Committee for Europe, taking place in Astana, Kazakhstan on 24-26 October 2023.

Through the Declaration, countries across the Region are making a series of comprehensive commitments. These cover tackling pollution; ensuring everyone has access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene; integrating nature and biodiversity considerations into policies; and promoting a clean, safe and healthy built environment. Several commitments target health systems, requiring countries to improve how they prevent, prepare for, detect and respond to emergencies, as well as ensure they are more environmentally sustainable and resilient to climate change. Investment in human resources, innovation and research, as well as stronger oversight and governance, will be key to achieve these commitments.

To accelerate implementation, [four EHP partnerships](#) have been established – on Human Biomonitoring, Health Sector Climate Action, Healthy Active Mobility, and Youth – bringing together countries and partners through this new voluntary and flexible mechanism. Furthermore, WHO's Regional Director held bilateral meetings between with various Environment Ministers and other heads of delegations including Belgium, Netherlands, France, Hungary and Germany, along with talks with UNEP's new Regional Director for Europe and the President of the United Nations General Assembly.

The Declaration is available at: <https://www.who.int/europe/publications/m/item/declaration-of-the-seventh-ministerial-conference-on-environment-and-health>.

More information is available at: <https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/05-07-2023-clean-air---green-planet---good-health-for-all>.

ONGOING AVIAN INFLUENZA OUTBREAKS IN ANIMALS POSE RISK TO HUMANS

Situation analysis and advice to countries from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), WHO and the World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH)

The current outbreaks of avian influenza (also called “bird flu”) have caused devastation in animal populations, including poultry, wild birds, and some mammals, and harmed farmers’ livelihoods and the food trade. Although largely affecting animals, these outbreaks pose ongoing risks to humans.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Health Organization (WHO), and the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) are urging countries to work together across sectors to save as many animals as possible and to protect people.

Avian influenza viruses normally spread among birds, but the increasing number of H₅N₁ avian influenza detections among mammals—which are biologically closer to humans than birds are—raises concern that the virus might adapt to infect humans more easily. In addition, some mammals may act as mixing vessels for influenza viruses, leading to the emergence of new viruses that could be more harmful to animals and humans.

In 2023, another 14 countries reported outbreaks, mainly in the Americas, as the disease continues to spread. Several mass death events have been reported in wild birds, caused by influenza A (H₅N₁) clade 2.3.4.4b viruses.

FAO, WHO and WOAH have been convening experts to review the situation, monitoring the rapidly evolving nature of the virus, and updating recommendations for curbing its spread, in addition to working with countries in preparedness and response, and facilitating collaboration across countries and sectors. The spread of the virus to five continents speaks to the need for global cooperation and alertness to protect animals, people and economies.

Curbing the spread of avian influenza:

- Prevent avian influenza at its source
- Rapidly detect, report and respond to animal outbreaks
- Strengthen influenza surveillance in animals and humans
- Conduct epidemiological and virological investigations around animal outbreaks and human infections
- Share the genetic sequence data
- Encourage collaboration between the animal and human health sectors
- Communicate the risk
- Ensure influenza pandemic preparedness at all levels.

More information is available at: <https://www.who.int/news/item/12-07-2023-ongoing-avian-influenza-outbreaks-in-animals-pose-risk-to-humans>.

WHO/EUROPE AND EUROPEAN COMMISSION ESTABLISH NEW PARTNERSHIP FOR BETTER LONG-TERM CARE

WHO/Europe and the European Commission have joined forces to support countries in the European Union working to improve long-term care. The new partnership, which will inform WHO/Europe's work in the European Region, will focus on improving access and quality of long-term care services while providing important support to informal caregivers, who often play a crucial role in care provision.

Within the European Region, 135 million people are living with disabilities, and nearly 1 in 3 older people cannot meet their basic needs independently. Access to good-quality, integrated, long-term care is essential for these people to maintain their functional ability, enjoy basic human rights and live with dignity.

Integrated delivery of care happens when people can access the care they need in a timely and comprehensive way, with services ranging from prevention, treatment, long-term care to rehabilitative or palliative care. These can be provided in health and long-term care facilities, in their homes or in the community.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the vulnerabilities of care systems, including inadequate long-term care services and poor integration with health-care delivery. In the European Union alone, the initial waves of the pandemic resulted in approximately 200 000 deaths among residents of long-term care facilities.

"The lessons of the pandemic are clear. But are we better prepared now to face a challenge of this scale? What we know is that we need to invest more in our health systems, including in the way we deliver long-term care to those who need it," said Dr Natasha Azzopardi-Muscat, WHO/Europe's Director of Country Health Policies and Systems.

"Improving access and quality of care across our communities will be key, in addition to supporting caregivers, irrespective of whether they are family members, volunteers or part of the workforce. We are proud of this new partnership with the European Union in this important area of work, and we look forward to leveraging all the tools we have at our disposal to protect people's health, regardless of where they live," Dr Azzopardi-Muscat added.

"Many long-term care challenges are not just national or European, but global. We are therefore happy to join forces with WHO, building also on their extensive expertise in supporting reforms towards integrated care and adapting health systems to the needs of an ageing population. The strategic partnership with WHO is a step forward towards ensuring access to high-quality affordable long-term care for all," said Ms Katarina Ivanković Knežević, Director for Social Rights and Inclusion at the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission.

More information is available at: <https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/11-07-2023-who-europe-and-european-commission-establish-new-partnership-for-better-long-term-care>.

WHO DIRECTOR-GENERAL DISCUSSES PRIORITIES ON TRADITIONAL, COMPLEMENTARY AND INTEGRATIVE HEALTHCARE WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

WHO Director-General, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and a group of WHO senior officials met with representatives of civil society on 3 July 2023, to discuss their priorities on traditional, complementary and integrative medicine, in the lead up to the WHO Traditional Medicine Global Summit on 17 and 18 August 2023 in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India.

The virtual dialogue was coordinated by the People's Declaration for Traditional, Complementary and Integrative Healthcare, a worldwide civil society coalition of users and practitioners of traditional, complementary and integrative healthcare. Representatives of more than 300 civil society organisations (CSOs) and over 600 people were in attendance, bringing the full force of the knowledge and expertise on traditional, complementary and integrative health (TCIH) to the forefront.

In his opening remarks, Dr Tedros said: *“Traditional, complementary, and integrative health is rooted in the knowledge and resources of communities. For millions of people around the world, it is their first stop for health and well-being, and an integral part of their health system. It is for precisely these reasons that dialogues with civil society organizations are so important to WHO, as we shape our guidance and policy recommendations for countries.”*

WHO has started the development of the new traditional medicine strategy 2025-2034 as requested by Member States at the World Health Assembly in May 2023, during which they have also extended WHO traditional medicine strategy: 2014-2023 for another two years, until 2025. Suggestions and proposals from the civil society will contribute to this important task, and will also inform the work of the WHO Global Centre for Traditional Medicine to harness the potential of traditional medicine from across the world to improve the health of people and the planet. Furthermore, the dialogue will contribute to WHO's work on traditional, complementary and integrative medicine (TCIM), which seeks to respond to requests from countries for evidence and data to inform policies and practice, global standards and regulation to ensure safety, quality, equitable access and use, and support for scientific, innovation and technological advances in traditional medicine practices.

This virtual dialogue was part of a series of CSO Dialogues with the WHO Director-General to better understand civil society priorities and strengthen the important relationship between WHO and civil society organisations.

[WHO Traditional Medicine Global Summit](#)

[People's Declaration for Traditional, Complementary and Integrative Healthcare](#)

Dr Tedros [opening remarks](#)

[WHO traditional medicine strategy: 2014-2023](#)

[WHO Global Centre for Traditional Medicine](#)

The Full report from the meeting is available at: <https://www.who.int/news/item/10-07-2023-who-director-general-discusses-priorities-on-traditional--complementary-and-integrative-healthcare-with-civil-society>.

TRANSFORMING THE HEALTH AND SOCIAL EQUITY LANDSCAPE



The WHO report, titled "Transforming the health and social equity landscape: promoting socially just and inclusive growth to improve resilience, solidarity, and peace," examines the connections between health, economy, and social capital. It calls for Member States to foster social cohesion and invest in health to enhance resilience and support an equitable recovery.

The report builds on the findings of the Pan-European Commission on Health and Sustainable Development, emphasizing that excluding people from economic and social progress leads to wider societal divisions. The aim is to understand how health equity and social and economic determinants of health have altered in the wake of recent crises, and to encourage policies and alliances for health equity for recovery and resilience.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the interwoven nature of health, economy, and society. The rising cost of living, combined with the extensive effects of the pandemic, have created new vulnerabilities that impact health and social conditions unevenly. Failure to address these consequences heightens vulnerabilities and leaves people inadequately protected against future challenges.

The report's findings are based on activities including analysis of WHO Health Equity Status Report initiative indicators since the onset of the pandemic, review of major international organizations' recovery-related policies, and engagement with policymakers, academic experts, and international organizations.

Health inequities have expanded across various health and well-being indicators since the onset of COVID-19. Particularly, mortality was higher in poorer countries where health system investment was lower, resulting in 600 000 excess deaths. The report highlights how underinvestment in health services costs lives.

Economic exclusion exacerbates poverty and poor physical and mental well-being. The pandemic and subsequent crises have led to a rise in unemployment across the WHO European Region. Meanwhile, the cost-of-living crisis has surfaced, threatening recovery at a time when people are least equipped to cope. If mitigation measures and protections don't deliver discernible benefits, trust in institutions and governments falls, contributing to social divisions.

The report underscores the focus of mitigation and recovery strategies on digital and green investment avenues. Digital technologies present opportunities for economic growth, while the political commitment to climate crisis has fast-tracked focus on green economies. However, these transitions overlook inequities by failing to recognize their potential for equitable recovery and overlooking existing sectoral disparities.

Trust is fundamental to addressing these crises and recovery. The COVID-19 pandemic has led to varying experiences for different population groups, with trust in others and institutions decreasing, particularly among low-income individuals and the unemployed. The report points out that these experiences have highlighted the disadvantage and discrimination faced by minority ethnic groups and migrants, causing a rise in health inequities.

The full report is available at: <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/370945>.

INTRODUCING RAPID SOCIAL LISTENING AND INFODEMIC INSIGHTS FOR ACTION: WHO AND UNICEF LAUNCH MANUAL ON 6 STEPS TO BUILD AN INFODEMIC INSIGHTS REPORT

When high quality health information is not available and questions and concerns go unaddressed, low quality health information or misinformation can quickly spread across communities and impact people's health decisions. In response to the need to understand the health information environment and help health workers better communicate and engage with the public to encourage healthy behaviours, WHO and UNICEF, in collaboration with their networks and partners, have published a ground-breaking manual and accompanying tools for analysts who conduct social listening to develop infodemic insights. What makes this manual unique is that it emphasizes an evidence-based and reproducible process performing integrated analysis across online and offline datasets to produce infodemic insights and recommendations for action to improve public health.

"Infodemic insights are critical in understanding the information environment driving narratives during an emergency," remarked Dr Sylvie Briand, Director, Epidemic and Pandemic Preparedness and Prevention at WHO. *"When people are confused or overwhelmed with information, it can be difficult to know where to turn to for credible health information and infodemic insights can provide evidence-based recommendations on how to address such challenges, and do it quickly when time is of the essence."*

The infodemic insights manual provides guidance for each of the six steps to building an insights report, which include:

- 1) Choosing the question that infodemic management insights could help to answer
- 2) Identifying and selecting the data sources and develop an analysis plan for each data source
- 3) Conducting an integrated analysis across these data sources
- 4) Developing strategies and recommendations
- 5) Developing an infodemic insights report
- 6) Disseminating the infodemic insights report and tracking the actions taken

The full report is available at: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240075658>.

More information is available at: <https://www.who.int/news/item/06-07-2023-introducing-rapid-social-listening-and-infodemic-insights-for-action-who-and-unicef-launch-manual-on-6-steps-to-build-an-infodemic-insights-report>.

122 MILLION MORE PEOPLE PUSHED INTO HUNGER SINCE 2019 DUE TO MULTIPLE CRISES, REVEALS UN REPORT



The latest *State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World* report warns that over 122 million more people have faced hunger since 2019 due to the pandemic, weather shocks, and conflicts, including the war in Ukraine. The report, jointly published by five UN agencies, reveals that hunger afflicted between 691 and 783 million people in 2022, marking a rise of 122 million compared to 2019. While progress was observed in Asia and Latin America, hunger increased in Western Asia, the Caribbean, and all African subregions. The report states that current trends jeopardize the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal of ending hunger and calls for intensified efforts to transform agrifood systems. It also highlights the impact of increased urbanization on food consumption patterns and stresses the need for comprehensive policy interventions to address food security and nutrition in changing rural-urban dynamics.

The full report is available at: [The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023: Urbanization, agrifood systems transformation and healthy diets across the rural–urban continuum.](#)

More information is available at: [https://www.who.int/news/item/12-07-2023-122-million-more-people-pushed-into-hunger-since-2019-due-to-multiple-crises--reveals-un-report.](https://www.who.int/news/item/12-07-2023-122-million-more-people-pushed-into-hunger-since-2019-due-to-multiple-crises--reveals-un-report)

WOMEN AND GIRLS BEAR BRUNT OF WATER AND SANITATION CRISIS – NEW UNICEF-WHO REPORT



Globally, women are most likely to be responsible for fetching water for households, while girls are nearly twice as likely as boys to bear the responsibility, and spend more time doing it each day, according to a new report released today by UNICEF and WHO.

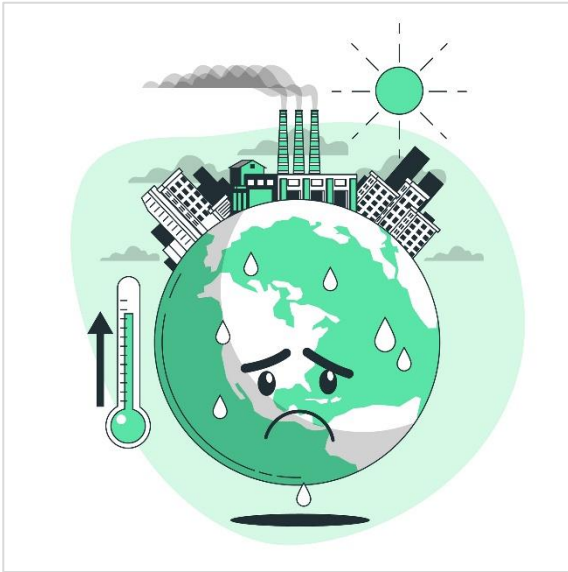
Progress on household drinking water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) 2000–2022: Special focus on gender – which provides the first in-depth analysis of gender inequalities in WASH – also notes that women and girls are more likely to feel unsafe using a toilet outside of the home and disproportionately feel the impact of lack of hygiene.

“Every step a girl takes to collect water is a step away from learning, play, and safety,” said Cecilia Sharp, UNICEF Director of WASH and Climate, Environment, Energy and Disaster Risk Reduction (CEED). *“Unsafe water, toilets, and handwashing at home robs girls of their potential, compromises their well-being, and perpetuates cycles of poverty. Responding to girls’ needs in the design and implementation of WASH programmes is critical to reaching universal access to water and sanitation and achieving gender equality and empowerment.”*

The full publication is available at: <https://data.unicef.org/resources/jmp-report-2023/>.

More information is available at: <https://www.who.int/news/item/06-07-2023-women-and-girls-bear-brunt-of-water-and-sanitation-crisis---new-unicef-who-report>.

THE LANCET: EU SHOULD ALIGN WITH WHO AIR QUALITY GUIDELINES



Air pollution is associated with adverse health effects including cardiovascular and respiratory disease, stroke, cancer, and dementia. Even low levels of air pollutants harm health and that is why WHO has recently tightened its limits in revised guidelines on air quality. Air pollution is the greatest environmental health risk in Europe, according to the European Environment Agency (EEA). Indeed, despite improvements in recent years, the mortality burden associated with air pollution remains high in Europe, with latest estimates from EEA of 238 000 premature deaths associated with particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) and 49 000 premature deaths associated with nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) in 2020. As part of the European Green Deal's zero pollution plan to have an environment free of harmful pollution by 2050, the European Commission published a proposal

for a revision of the Ambient Air Quality Directives to align more closely with WHO's guidelines. Although the proposed revision is a step forward, it has been long overdue and is not ambitious enough, as the proposed limits would allow pollution levels higher than those recommended by WHO.

Urban populations in particular are exposed to air pollution well above the health-based guideline level set by WHO. In this issue of *The Lancet Public Health*, Sasha Khomenko and colleagues provide novel insights into the health effects of sector-specific contributions to air pollution in European cities. Khomenko and colleagues assessed spatial and sectoral emission contributions to air pollutants and premature mortality in 857 European cities. The results indicated that for PM_{2.5}-related mortality, the highest contributors were the residential and agricultural sectors, whereas for NO₂-related mortality, the main contributor was transport. Large and capital cities contributed more to their own air pollution and mortality compared with small cities. This finding is important considering urbanisation is expected to increase by more than 80% by 2050. Taken together, Khomenko and colleagues' findings show the scale of the issue and emphasise the need for coordinated actions across multiple sectors.

[WHO guidelines on air quality.](#)

[EC proposal for a revision of the Ambient Air Quality Directives.](#)

The full article is available at: [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667\(23\)00132-9/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(23)00132-9/fulltext).

ICMRA STATEMENT ON THE SAFETY OF COVID-19 VACCINES



The International Coalition of Medicines Regulatory Authorities (ICMRA) has stated that COVID-19 vaccines significantly lower the risk of severe disease, hospitalization, and death, and may require boosters for protection against new variants. Over 13 billion vaccine doses have been administered worldwide with a strong safety profile across all ages. While side effects are generally mild and temporary, rare but serious side effects have been monitored and managed. ICMRA also affirmed that the benefits of vaccines far outweigh the possible risks, and they have not contributed to excess mortality. Misinformation

regarding vaccine safety, often exaggerating side effects and attributing unrelated medical events to the vaccines, has likely resulted in more deaths than the vaccines' adverse effects. The vaccines have also demonstrated safety in special populations, such as pregnant women and children, and may reduce the risk of long COVID. ICMRA emphasized the importance of reliable information sources, countering false claims about vaccine safety.

The full statement is available at: https://icmra.info/drupal/strategicinitiatives/vaccines/safety_statement.

WHO/EUROPE AND EPHA SIGN NEW MOU TO STRENGTHEN COLLABORATION FOR BETTER HEALTH AND WELL-BEING IN EUROPE



In a significant step towards promoting health equity and improving people's health, WHO/Europe and the European Public Health Alliance (EPHA) have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to enhance their partnership. EPHA, as Europe's leading alliance of nongovernmental organizations advocating for better health for all, will work closely with WHO/Europe to address key health challenges and drive positive change.

With 80 member organizations representing diverse groups, including civil society organizations, health professionals and public health actors, EPHA serves as a change agent. It does this by collating its members' perspectives and facilitating their participation in European policy dialogues. Since its foundation 30 years ago, EPHA has grown into the largest civil society platform of organizations working together to protect and improve public health in the European Union. In doing so, it aligns with WHO's European Programme of Work and its goal of achieving the highest possible level of health, sustainable development, and prosperity for all. The newly agreed collaboration between WHO/Europe and EPHA is intended to contribute to WHO/Europe's initiatives in health promotion, health equity, and investment for health and well-being.

"We are proud to be signing this agreement with EPHA, a well-known voice for public health across Europe," said WHO Regional Director Dr Hans Henri P. Kluge. *"Together, we will build on our past work and move forward, focusing on intelligence and information sharing, joint advocacy for health, and stronger connections of health stakeholders across Europe."*

Intelligence and information sharing will be a crucial aspect of the partnership, particularly within the EU context.

The signing of this MoU formalizes a long-standing partnership between WHO/Europe and EPHA and marks a significant milestone in the journey towards better health and well-being in Europe. By leveraging the strengths and expertise of both WHO/Europe and EPHA, this partnership promises to drive systemic change and reduce health inequalities, ultimately leading to a healthier future for all people and the planet.

[EPHA's contribution to the WHO Europe Access to Novel Medicines Platform](#)

More information is available at: <https://www.who.int/europe/news/item/30-06-2023-who-europe-and-the-epha-sign-new-mou-to-strengthen-collaboration-for-better-health-and-well-being-in-europe>.

WHO RECOMMENDS STRONGER POLICIES TO PROTECT CHILDREN FROM THE HARMFUL IMPACT OF FOOD MARKETING



WHO has released a new guideline on policies to protect children from the harmful impact of food marketing. The guideline recommends that countries implement comprehensive mandatory policies to protect children of all ages from the marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages that are high in saturated fatty acids, trans-fatty acids, free sugars and/or salt (HFSS).

More than 10 years after Member States endorsed WHO's recommendations on the marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children in 2010, children continue to be exposed to powerful marketing of HFSS foods and non-alcoholic beverages, consumption of which is associated with negative health effects.

The updated recommendation is based on the findings of reviews of recent evidence, including how exposure to and the power of food marketing affects children's health, eating behaviours, and food-related attitudes and beliefs. In short, food marketing remains a threat to public health and continues to negatively affect children's food choices, intended choices and their dietary intake. It also negatively influences the development of children's norms about food consumption.

The recommendation is also based on a systematic review of the evidence on policies to restrict food marketing, including on contextual factors. Policies to restrict food marketing suggests are shown to be most effective if they: are mandatory; protect children of all ages; use a government-led nutrient profile model to classify foods to be restricted from marketing; and are sufficiently comprehensive to minimize the risk of migration of marketing to other age groups, other spaces within the same medium or to other media, including digital spaces. 'Restricting the power of food marketing to persuade' is also impactful, which involves limiting the use of cartoons or techniques that appeal to children, such as including toys with products, advertising with songs, and celebrity endorsements.

"Aggressive and pervasive marketing of foods and beverages high in fats, sugars and salt to children is responsible for unhealthy dietary choices," said Dr Francesco Branca, Director of the Department of Nutrition and Food Safety of WHO. *"Calls to responsible marketing practices have not had a meaningful impact. Governments should establish strong and comprehensive regulations."*

The publication is available at: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240047518>.

More information is available at: <https://www.who.int/news/item/03-07-2023-who-recommends-stronger-policies-to-protect-children-from-the-harmful-impact-of-food-marketing>.

WHO AND HL7 COLLABORATE TO SUPPORT ADOPTION OF OPEN INTEROPERABILITY STANDARDS

Recognising the importance of interoperability standards in digital health transformation, WHO and standards-development organisation, Health Level Seven International (HL7®), signed a Project Collaboration Agreement to support the adoption of open interoperability standards, globally. Adoption of interoperability standards are critical for consistent representation of data and information in health. This consistency allows for various digital health solutions to seamlessly communicate and exchange information, enabling and supporting continuity of care at all levels of the health system, regardless of the software used. For example, interoperable digital solutions can ensure that information from a primary care provider can be easily shared with a specialist health care provider, which is needed as part of the referral process.

Outlined in the *Global strategy on digital health 2020–2025*, there is a call for WHO to provide global guidance on interoperability standards adoption and guidance on how WHO clinical, public health and data guidance can be translated into digital health systems. To support implementation of the Global Strategy on Digital Health, WHO has established the SMART Guidelines approach. SMART Guidelines encode packages of WHO evidence-based recommendations and clinical and public health protocols into decision support logic, data dictionaries and computable care plans using interoperability standards. One of the principal interoperability standards used for person-centred digital solutions is HL7 Fast Healthcare Interoperability Resources (FHIR®), which is an API-based open data exchange standard.

The objectives of the collaboration between WHO and HL7 International are to:

1. Strengthen implementation of the WHO Global strategy on digital health 2020-2025 at country level and build capacity to support the adoption and appropriate use of interoperability standards in Member States in an equitable manner.
2. Increase access to WHO's guidance and recommendations through developing interoperability specifications that are applicable globally and suited for local adaptation.
3. Support the use of WHO Family of international classifications and terminologies (WHO-FIC) in the HL7 FHIR community.
4. Make available the technical infrastructure (e.g. sandbox testing environment) and documentation to support interoperability.

[Project Collaboration Agreement.](#)

[Global strategy on digital health 2020-2025](#)

[the SMART Guidelines.](#)

More information is available at: <https://www.who.int/news/item/03-07-2023-who-and-hl7-collaborate-to-support-adoption-of-open-interoperability-standards>.

E-LEARNING COURSES ARE TRANSFORMING OUR WAY OF LEARNING



WHO launched two new e-courses on national strategic planning for TB and systematic screening for TB disease at this week's meeting of its Strategic and Technical Advisory Group (STAG-TB). The new WHO e-courses have been added to the End TB Channel in OpenWHO.

Please register for these WHO courses that are designed to facilitate the uptake of latest WHO TB related guidelines and guidance documents.

Using latest adult learning principles, the courses consist of a combination of videos, presentations, quizzes and case studies and build on information provided in WHO operational handbooks on TB and other WHO guidance documents. They are free of charge and can be taken at your own pace. A certificate can be downloaded if you achieve a 80% score or higher in the final assessment.

"The End TB Channel in OpenWHO now features eight courses and has over 25 000 unique users registered", said Dr Tereza Kasaeva, Director of WHO's Global TB Programme. "The new e-courses will serve as an important tool for national stakeholders, technical staff of WHO and partners, and consultants to build their strategic and operational knowledge on the latest developments in TB prevention and care, and contribute to efforts towards ending TB."

[End TB Channel in OpenWHO](#)

[E-course on systematic screening for TB disease](#)

[E-course on National Strategic Planning for TB](#)

More information is available at: <https://www.who.int/news/item/06-07-2023-e-learning-courses-are-transforming-our-way-of-learning>.

SOCIALNET: AN RCCE LEARNING EXPERIENCE THAT PLACES SOCIAL SCIENCES FRONT AND CENTER



The application of social-behavioural approaches is increasingly being recognized as invaluable in nurturing relationships between communities and the agencies who serve them. With this in mind, more than 30 risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) experts from WHO and Ministries of Health in 11 European countries gathered from 3-10 June 2023 in Krakow, Poland, for the learning experience, “**SocialNet + RCCE-IM School Training – Global Tools, Regional Guidance, Local Wisdom.**” The five-day, face-to-face training

focused upon paving the way for social sciences to be more fully integrated into response practices during health emergencies.

The event featured interactive didactic sessions, scenario-based application of skills and practice, and a functional exercise that mimicked real-life response activities. The event was supported by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the WHO EURO RCCE-IM School. The faculty included WHO and CDC experts speaking on the importance of RCCE in incident management structures. The event was a great success, with one participant describing it as, “*Magnificent! It was unlike anything I have ever experienced before. Over the span of a week, we received comprehensive instruction that truly engaged us.*”

More on this topic can be found at: [WHO policy brief: Building trust through risk communication and community engagement, 14 September 2022.](#)

The GDG will meet in October and November 2023 aiming to:

- examine the grading of recommendations assessment, development and evaluation (GRADE) evidence profiles or other assessments of the quality of the evidence used to inform the recommendations on the five above mentioned areas;
- interpret the evidence, with explicit consideration of the overall balance of benefits and harms;
- formulate recommendations, taking into account benefits, harms, values and preferences, feasibility, equity, acceptability, resource requirements and other factors, as appropriate; and
- suggest implementation considerations and highlight research gaps for the guidelines.

More on [WHO guidance for guideline development.](#)

More information is available at: [https://www.who.int/news/item/28-06-2023-who-announces-the-development-of-the-guideline-on-the-health-of-trans-and-gender-diverse-people.](https://www.who.int/news/item/28-06-2023-who-announces-the-development-of-the-guideline-on-the-health-of-trans-and-gender-diverse-people)

WHO PUBLICATIONS

Declaration of the Seventh Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health



Representatives of the European Region of the World Health Organization convened at the 7th Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health in Budapest from July 5-7, 2023. The conference aimed to strengthen commitment to health and sustainability amidst concerning environmental health risks, including 1.4 million premature deaths annually due to factors like air pollution. The combined impact of the "triple crisis" of climate change, environmental pollution, and biodiversity loss was underscored, which the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated. Additionally, the conference recognized an increase in mental health issues due to climate and environmental crises and the need for sustainable energy sources. The importance of intersectoral action, promoting healthy environments, and implementing the One Health and Planetary Health approaches was highlighted. Lastly, the conference acknowledged

the role of the EU's policies and the impact of the European Environment and Health Process in setting the policy agenda and addressing health and environmental challenges.

Taking action to protect children from the harmful impact of food marketing: a child rights-based approach



This joint UNICEF and WHO publication aims to guide governments and partners through the steps to introduce policies to protect children from the harmful impact of food marketing.

Structured into three parts, the first part describes the impact of food marketing on children and identifies the main developments and challenges in the marketing landscape observed in the past decade. Part 2 outlines why a child rights-based approach can and should be used by governments to restrict food marketing. Part 3 identifies how governments can take action to restrict food marketing and is organized by the main stages in a policy cycle: policy preparation, policy development, implementation (including enforcement and monitoring for compliance), and monitoring and evaluation for policy impact.

This publication expands on previous guidance and outlines steps to strengthen the government's position against legal challenges, it outlines oppositional tactics and common arguments used against policies and provides counterarguments based on a child rights-based approach and the available scientific evidence.

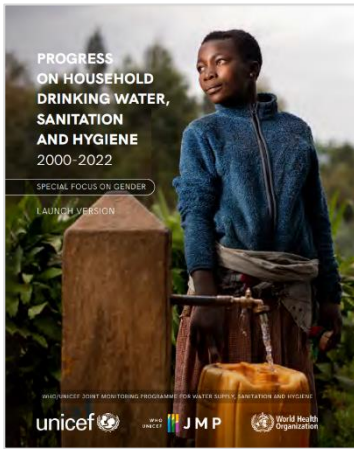
WHO/UNICEF How to build an infodemic insights report in 6 steps

This manual guides the creation of an infodemic insights report to bridge the gap between health guidance and public behaviour. The steps include choosing a question,



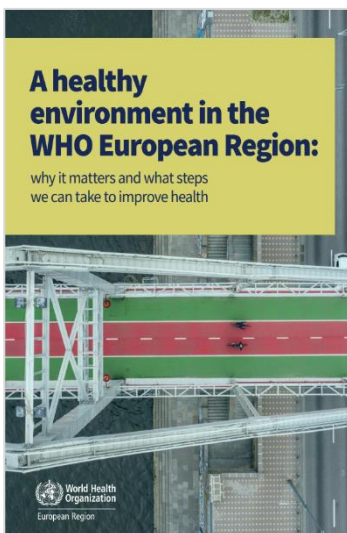
identifying data sources, conducting an integrated analysis, developing strategies and recommendations, producing a report, and tracking its dissemination and actions taken. Each chapter of the manual explains one step, complemented by printable templates, worksheets, and reference handouts on health context analysis.

Progress on household drinking-water, sanitation and hygiene 2000-2022: Special focus on gender



The 2023 WHO/UNICEF JMP report on household drinking water, sanitation and hygiene has a special focus on gender, and provides the first in-depth analysis of gender inequalities in WASH services. The report presents new sex-disaggregated data on the burden of water collection, as well as perceptions of safety outside the household after dark among men and women without private sanitation facilities. Emerging indicators on menstrual health are highlighted, including national data from 53 countries. And while not sex-disaggregated, a number of WASH indicators should be considered as gender-sensitive, including accessibility of drinking water sources, use of private sanitation facilities, and access to handwashing facilities with soap and water in the home.

A healthy environment in the WHO European Region: why it matters and what steps we can take to improve health



This document intends to present an overview of the environmental health burden and other pertinent health data for the WHO European Region. It serves as a preparatory resource for the 7th Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, which took place from 5-7 July 2023, in Budapest. The information compiled forms a basis for discussions about the current state of environment and health, and the measures Member States can implement to secure a healthy future for the entire Region. The analysis built upon fact sheets prepared for the 6th Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health held in Ostrava, Czechia in June 2017. Following the Ostrava Declaration, key environmental health challenges were identified for the WHO European Region, and their impact evaluated. This document dissects and delineates these identified risk factors, providing additional quantitative evidence and potential actions to mitigate their detrimental effects.

This new report shows the following, in the Region, covering Europe and central Asia:

- Every year, there are more than 1.4 million deaths associated with avoidable environmental risks to health. These deaths account for approximately 15% of the burden of disease in the Region.
- About 570 000 deaths could be attributed to ambient air pollution, and more than 150 000 deaths to household air pollution in 2019.
- About 77 million people lacked access to safely managed drinking water in 2020.
- Only last year, at least 20 000 people died from extreme heat in what was the hottest summer ever recorded in Europe.
- Green spaces have a protective health effect that can reduce natural-cause mortality by nearly 1%.

WHO EVENTS

Deep-dive discussions on how to build an infodemic insights report in 6 steps; 20 July 2023

These are follow-up webinars to the official launch of the [WHO/UNICEF infodemic insights manual](#), designed for those incorporating infodemic management into their work, to explore advanced topics discussed in the manual.

[Register for the webinar at 9:00 Geneva time](#)

[Register for the webinar at 14:00 Geneva time](#)

Summer school in Nice, France: A systems approach to the promotion of healthy lifestyles; 18-20 July 2023; Nice, France

The WHO European Office for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases of WHO/Europe, the Université Côte d'Azur and the Ulysseus European University, in collaboration with Queen's University Belfast and York University, invite you to apply to join a three-day summer school course on how to navigate the concept of systems thinking and systems-based approaches from theory to practice.

The course will provide insights on how these approaches can facilitate consensus among different stakeholders while also providing a platform for strengthening multisectoral collaboration across complex systems.

Day 1 of the summer school will be live streamed online. Hans Henri P. Kluge, WHO/Europe Regional Director will participate in a panel discussion.

[Day 1 live streaming registration link.](#)

WHO WEBINARS

Webinar series: Alcohol and Public Health (open for all)

As part of the training course on alcohol and public health in Europe that started in May 2023, WHO/Europe is launching a series of webinars for everyone with an interest in alcohol from a public health perspective.

The series is primarily aimed at graduate and postgraduate students, early career researchers, and young professionals in various fields like public health, social sciences, medicine and economics, but anyone is welcome to join. You do not have to be a training course participant to watch the webinars.

All webinars are free to attend. Registration in advance is required and can be completed using the [Webinar Registration form](#).

The webinars are 60 minutes in length and are held in English. Recordings will be available on the WHO website after the webinar.

TOPICS & DATES

25 July 2023, 10:00–11:00 CEST

Alcohol use disorders: early detection and treatment

4 September 2023, 10:00–11:00 CEST

Alcohol cultures and stigma: overview of key concepts

WHO STORIES

Integrating ear and hearing care in primary care: Stefan's story

A few years ago, during a three-week holiday, Dr Stefan Teughels had time to reflect on his demanding work as a general practitioner and chairperson of general practice organizations in Belgium. By the end of his break, he had decided to quit his job as a general practitioner. "On the Monday, I started my practice and within one hour of patient contact, I had changed my mind," he recalls. "The close relationship with patients, even a personal connection with some... it's such a unique privilege, I wouldn't want to miss it."

WHO VIDEOS

Check out our official video channel on YouTube for the latest video news on our work from around the globe:

<https://www.youtube.com/c/who/playlists>.

Protecting health through nature and biodiversity

Dr Jane Goodall's powerful keynote address on nature, biodiversity, and health

Elevating health in climate change

Addressing the health effects of environmental pollution

Tackling the "triple environmental crisis" and building forward from the COVID-19 pandemic

SOURCES

- <https://www.who.int/>
- <https://data.unicef.org/>
- <https://openwho.org/channels/end-tb>
- https://commission.europa.eu/index_en
- <https://epha.org/>
- <https://www.tcih.org/>
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