April 2022, Cairo – World Health Day 2022 will be celebrated globally on the 7 April, focusing on environmental threats and their effect on the health of the planet.

The theme of this year's campaign is "Our planet, our health", which aims to keep humans and the planet healthy and foster a movement to create societies more focused on well-being. 

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Environment-related issues are among the major causes of health problems worldwide. WHO estimates that more than 13 million deaths around the world each year are due to avoidable environmental causes. This includes the climate crisis that is the single biggest health threat facing humanity.

In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, environmental risks, including climate change, are responsible for 23% of the total burden of disease and as much as 30% of the disease burden for children. An estimated 1 million people die prematurely every year as a result of living and working in unhealthy environments.

"The climate crisis is also a health crisis," says Dr Ahmed Al-Mandhari, WHO's Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, "It is impossible to have a healthy society in a polluted environment, or to have a clean environment in an unhealthy society. The global COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted just how interconnected and vulnerable our world has become – and how sick."

Environmental causes are avoidable; however, the political, social and commercial decisions are driving the climate and health crisis. Over 99% of people in the Region breathe unhealthy air.

Extreme weather events, land degradation and water scarcity are displacing people and affecting their health. Systems that produce highly processed, unhealthy foods and beverages are driving a wave of obesity, increasing cancer and heart disease, while generating a third of global greenhouse gas emissions.

Environmental hazards such as polluted air, toxic chemicals and lack of access to safe water and sanitation exacerbate the Region's inherent vulnerability to infectious disease outbreaks, epidemics and pandemics, including the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

There is growing evidence of a direct connection between environmental change and the emergence or transmission of COVID-19, while on the other hand the pandemic has diverted resources from development efforts and placed additional stresses on ecosystems and health systems. However, COVID-19 has brought about some short-lived positive effects on the environment through reduced global travel, with quarantine procedures in place in all countries, reduced number of mass gatherings and improved adherence to infection prevention and control measures that have all resulted in improvements to the environment. We need to ensure that we can sustain these improvements.

"Recovery from COVID-19 presents a historic opportunity to rebuild better and create cleaner, healthier and fairer systems and societies; tackling environmental risks is also an essential part of WHO's vision of Health for All by All in our Region," Dr Al-Mandhari added.

Some positive developments are taking place the Region; 11 countries committed to developing climate-resilient and sustainable health systems at the COP26 UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow last year, and more countries are urged to join this major initiative during the upcoming COP27 in Egypt.

World Health Day demonstrates the need to address the root causes of ill health that go far beyond the health sector. Concerted action by many different actors across different sectors is required, focusing on upstream interventions to prevent, minimize or mitigate environmental risks.

On this World Health Day, WHO calls on everyone – governments, businesses, health professionals, civil society, communities and individuals – to protect our planet and our health.

World Health Day 2022 website

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