

DID YOU KNOW? ... BY TAKING ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE YOU CAN IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH

WHO message to young people: *Climate change is damaging your health.
Act now, to protect the future.*

Why should you care about the impacts of climate change?

- 1. The bad news: the Earth's climates are changing for the worse, and human health and survival are endangered.** If things carry on as they are, climate change is going to have a dangerous effect on the essential things you need for good health: food, air and water. Scientific uncertainty and economic and political forces have stood in the way of adequate action until recently. The evidence now is crystal clear: the earth is warming and we humans are to blame. Like it or not, the problem will define most of your present and adult life.
- 2. Climate change affects everybody's health.** No matter where you live, climate change is already endangering your and your family's health, and will increasingly do so. Threats include more extreme weather conditions and rising sea levels, with heatwaves, storms, wildfires, floods and droughts. People will lose their homes and livelihoods. Famines and droughts could lead to mass migration and wars. Changes in infectious diseases will cause more deaths and suffering from malaria, dengue, diarrhoeal diseases and other big killers.
- 3. The risks are not fairly distributed.** Most greenhouse gases that cause climate change originate from richer industrialized countries but, unfairly, the health risks are mainly projected to fall on countries (and social groups within all countries) where malnutrition is widespread, education is poor, and health systems and services are weak. These most affected countries and social groups tend to be those that have contributed least to the problem.
- 4. The good news: action now can help save health, the environment and the economy.** While specific actions will depend on where you live, reducing the production of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide (CO₂) can have enormous benefits to your health, the environment and the economy. In countries where cars are the predominant means of transport, shifting to more walking and cycling will lower carbon emissions, increase physical activity (which will reduce obesity, heart disease and cancer), reduce traffic-related injuries and deaths and result in less pollution and noise. In countries where solid fuels are the predominant form of household heating and cooking energy, changing to cleaner fuels and more efficient stoves will lead to cleaner air and fewer illnesses and deaths related to indoor pollution. Money saved from not having to cover the health-care costs of climate change problems (e.g. respiratory difficulties caused by air pollution) and lost work time often matches or exceeds the costs of tackling the hazard itself!

What can you do to help?

There are many things you and everyone can do to reduce the effects of climate change on your health and prevent future damage. Here are some practical steps you can right now:

- 1. Inform yourself.** First, learn more about climate change and its effects on health. What is causing climate change? What are its current and potential effects on your health? Who is most vulnerable? What can you do about it? What can your organizations and countries do to protect health from climate change?
- 2. Put the word out through your networks.** Use face to face communications, or social media (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram etc) to spread the word about the actions people can take both to live more safely with current climate changes (adaptation) and to prevent (mitigate) future dangers. Use your school, university, club, sports, religious and local communities and other social networks to spread the message.
- 3. Take action to protect yourself and your family.** Find out about the local and immediate climate change threats to your and your family's health. Take action. In new potential malaria risk areas, for example, you can learn to recognize symptoms of malaria and how to prevent mosquito bites by using nets and insect repellents. In countries where heatwaves are the most immediate threat, you can learn how to avoid heat-related illnesses and protect your most vulnerable family members (small siblings and grandparents) and frail neighbours.
- 4. Learn about your "carbon footprint".** Your carbon footprint is a measure of how much CO₂ (one of the most important greenhouse gases) you produce through your transport, heating, cooling, lighting and other lifestyle choices. High carbon footprints are bad for health and the environment. Learn about your own carbon footprint with an online calculator.
- 5. Reduce your carbon footprint.** Once you know your carbon footprint, develop a plan to reduce it. If you are from a high carbon emitter country, you can identify ways to reduce your energy use through cycling, walking, using public transport and choosing products with smaller carbon impacts. If you are from a low carbon emitter country, you can learn how to keep making choices that are "carbon friendly". Annex 1 lists a few simple things everyone can do.
- 6. Join a climate change group.** Link up with others working for health. Take action — write to your Member of Parliament (MP), or campaign to reduce the carbon footprints of your school, workplace, community, city, or country.
- 7. When you get into a position of power, use it well!**

For more information visit www.who.int/globalchange