WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

NEWS RELEASE

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# WHO CALLS ON COUNTRIES TO PROTECT HEALTH FROM CLIMATE CHANGE

**17 November 2015 ¦ GENEVA -** Climate change is the defining issue for the 21st century.

According to WHO estimates, climate change is already causing tens of thousands of deaths every year - from shifting patterns of disease, from extreme weather events, such as heat-waves and floods, and from the degradation of air quality, food and water supplies, and sanitation.

The upcoming United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP-21) in Paris offers the world an important opportunity to not only reach a strong international climate agreement, but also to protect the health of current and future generations. WHO considers the Paris treaty to be a significant public health treaty – one that has the potential to save lives worldwide.

In 2012, WHO estimated 7 million people died from air pollution-related diseases, making it the world's largest single environmental health risk. It is predicted that climate change will cause an additional 250 000 deaths per year from malaria, diarrhoea, heat stress and under-nutrition between 2030 and 2050. Children, women and the poor in lower income countries will be the most vulnerable and most affected, widening health gaps.

Not only are ways to combat climate change already known and well-documented, they can bring important health gains. As WHO's new series of climate change and health country profiles illustrate, investments in low-carbon development, clean renewable energy, and strengthening climate resilience, are also investments in health.

Implementing proven interventions to reduce emissions of short-lived climate pollutants, like black carbon and methane, for example achieving higher vehicle emissions and efficiency standards, would be expected to save approximately 2.4 million lives a year and reduce global warming by about 0.5°C by 2050. Placing a price on polluting fuels to compensate their negative health impacts would be expected to cut outdoor air pollution deaths by half, reduce carbon dioxide emissions by more than 20%, and raise approximately US$ 3 trillion per year in revenue – over half the total value of health spending by all of the world's governments.

Strengthening health resilience to climate risks, including measures such as early-warning systems for more frequent and severe heatwaves, and protection of water, sanitation, and hygiene services against floods and droughts, would ensure that recent progress against climate-sensitive diseases, is not slowed or reversed.

Nevertheless, the profound consequences for health are still not given sufficient attention in debates about climate change.

In preparation for COP-21, countries have made important commitments to cut greenhouse gas emissions and scale up adaptation to climate change, but more needs to be done. If countries take strong actions to address climate change, while protecting and promoting health, they will collectively bring about a planet that is not only more environmentally intact, but also has cleaner air, more abundant and safer freshwater and food, more effective and fairer health and social protection systems - and as a result, healthier people.

The United Nations Climate Change Conference is the time for the health community to lend their voice to the international climate discussion and ask countries to come together and make bold commitments to protect our planet and the health of current and future generations.

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## MEASLES VACCINATION HAS SAVED AN ESTIMATED 17.1 MILLION LIVES SINCE 2000

**12 NOVEMBER 2015 ¦ GENEVA -** The number of measles-related deaths has decreased 79% from 546 800 at the beginning of the century to 114 900 in 2014. New data released by WHO for the Measles & Rubella Initiative, estimates that 17.1 million lives have been saved since 2000, largely due to increased vaccination coverage against this highly contagious viral disease. Measles vaccination has played a key role in reducing child mortality and in progress towards Millennium Development Goal 4.

However, the new data published in this week's edition of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC), "Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report" and WHO's "Weekly Epidemiological Record", shows that overall progress towards increasing global immunization coverage has recently stagnated. While coverage with the first dose of the measles vaccine increased globally from 72% to 85% between 2000 and 2010, it has remained unchanged the past 4 years.

"We cannot afford to drop our guard," says Dr Jean-Marie Okwo-Bele, Director of WHO's Department of Immunization, Vaccines and Biologicals. "If children miss routine vaccination and are not reached by national immunization campaigns, we will not close the immunization gap."

Based on current trends of measles vaccination coverage and incidence, the 2015 global milestones and measles elimination goals set by WHO's Member States will not be achieved on time.

Although all countries include at least 1 dose of measles-containing vaccine in their routine vaccination schedule, only 122 (63%) have met the target of at least 90% of children vaccinated with a first dose. Additionally, only half of the world's children are receiving the recommended second dose of the vaccine.

**Success of immunization campaigns**

In 2014, mass vaccination campaigns led by country governments with support from the Measles & Rubella Initiative and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, reached approximately 221 million children. Twenty-nine countries supplemented their routine vaccination programmes with mass immunization campaigns, helping to reduce