

The impact of chemicals, waste and pollution on human health

The Seventy-sixth World Health Assembly,

Reaffirming that the objective of WHO is the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health and its function, inter alia, as the directing and coordinating authority on international health work;

Reaffirming also that the Constitution of WHO defines health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, and declares that the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition;

Recognizing that the health sector has a critical role and unique expertise to contribute to the sound management of chemicals and waste and protecting from their harmful impacts on health and well-being;

Recognizing the importance of the One Health approach, including the work of the One Health High-Level Expert Panel, as well as the importance of WHO's role in this integrated, unifying approach in collaborating with the other Quadripartite Organizations (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH, founded as OIE) and their 2022–2026 One Health Joint Plan of Action;

Recalling WHO's longstanding recognition of the importance of sound chemicals management for human health, the key role of WHO in providing leadership and coordination on the human health aspects of the sound management of chemicals throughout their life cycle, and the necessity of health sector participation in, and contribution to, these efforts as set out in: resolution WHA59.15 (2006) on the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management; resolution WHA63.25 (2010) on improvement of health through safe and environmentally sound waste management; resolution WHA63.26 (2010) on improvement of health through sound management of obsolete pesticides and other obsolete chemicals; resolution WHA67.11 (2014) on public health impacts of exposure to mercury and mercury compounds; resolution WHA68.8 (2015) on health and the environment: addressing the health impact of air pollution; and WHA69.4 (2016) on the role of the health sector in the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management towards the 2020 goal and beyond;

Recalling the WHO Road map to enhance health sector engagement in the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management towards the 2020 goal and beyond and recognizing it as a tool to facilitate cross-sectoral collaboration and to identify concrete actions towards the achievement of the sound management of chemicals;

Recalling the WHO Global strategy on health, environment and climate change: the transformation needed to improve lives and well-being sustainably through healthy environments, that builds on: scaling up primary prevention; acting on determinants of health in all policies and sectors; strengthening health sector leadership, governance and coordination; building mechanisms for governance, and political and social support; generating the evidence base on risks and solutions; and monitoring progress;

Welcoming the resolution 5/8 on the establishment of a science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and prevent pollution, adopted by the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly and the invitation to WHO to play a role in the meetings of the ad-hoc open-ended working group to prepare proposals for the science-policy panel, as appropriate;

Further welcoming the resolution 5/14 entitled “End plastic pollution – Towards an international legally binding instrument”, also adopted by the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly;

Noting the adoption of Human Rights Council resolution 48/13 and General Assembly resolution 76/300 entitled “The human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment”;

Recognizing the work on the promotion of the sound management of chemicals and waste and the prevention of pollution by multilateral agreements and intergovernmental bodies, including the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC) and the International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM), and welcoming the continuation of their work to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution;

Recognizing that unsound management of chemicals and waste, as well as pollution, can cause significant adverse effects on human health and the environment, and these are important factors in many noncommunicable diseases;

Recognizing further the linkages between the health impacts of chemicals, waste and pollution and other priority global health issues including inequity and vulnerability, maternal and child health, antimicrobial resistance and the meaningful achievement of Universal Health Coverage, and that inaction on these linkages limits our collective capacity to strengthen our health systems, including in the context of health emergencies;

Noting that the market and non-market costs of inaction could be as high as 10% of global gross domestic product¹ and that 2 million lives and 53 million disability-adjusted life years were lost in 2019 due to exposures to selected chemicals² with nearly half of those deaths attributable to lead exposure and resulting cardiovascular disease and 138 000 deaths from pesticides involved in suicides representing 20% of all global suicides;³

¹ UNEP Global Chemicals Outlook II – Part 1 page 170
https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/28186/GCOII_PartI.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

² <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-HEP-ECH-EHD-21.01>.

³ <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240026629> WHO LIVE LIFE: An implementation guide for suicide prevention in countries.

Recognizing that robust data is only available for a small number of potential chemical exposures, and that people are exposed to many more chemicals in their daily lives, and noting that children are particularly vulnerable to these exposures resulting in childhood death, illnesses and disability, particularly in developing countries;¹

Emphasizing the cross-cutting nature and relevance of the sound management of chemicals and waste and the prevention of pollution to many of the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including for human health, gender equality, nutrition, sustainable consumption and production patterns, climate change, oceans and seas, clean air and water and biodiversity;²

Aware that production, consumption and the use of chemicals and the amount of waste generated will grow substantially over the coming years, and expressing great concern with regard to the unsound management of chemicals and waste and its adverse effects on human, animal and plant health and the environment;

Welcoming the acknowledgement of the interlinkages between biodiversity and health and the three objectives of the Convention for Biological Diversity in the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, agreeing that that framework is to be implemented by States Parties, with consideration of the One Health approach, among other holistic approaches that are based on science, mobilize multiple sectors, disciplines and communities to work together and aim to sustainably optimize the health of people, animals and plants and the equilibrium of ecosystems based on scientific evidence and on risk assessments developed by relevant international organizations, and recalling decision 14/4 of the Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity which requested the Executive Secretary and the World Health Organization, as well as other partners, to continue the development of a draft global action plan to mainstream biodiversity and health linkages into national policies, strategies, programmes and accounts;

Aware of the extensive WHO research concerning the linkages between pollution and health risks, including on the disproportionate effect it has on persons in vulnerable situations;³

Noting that the negotiations for the new international instrument for the Strategic Approach and sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020 are in progress for consideration at the 5th International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM5), it is timely to highlight the importance of health sector engagement in efforts to address the impacts of chemicals, waste and pollution;

Concerned that the production, consumption and disposal of plastic products, including microplastics and related chemicals, which can be released to the environment, may potentially impact human, plant and animal health as well as the environment, directly or indirectly;

¹ (https://www.who.int/health-topics/children-environmental-health#tab=tab_2) and/or UNICEF (2020, <https://www.unicef.org/reports/toxic-truth-childrens-exposure-to-lead-pollution-2020>). Research was also conducted by the Lancet Commission (2017 and 2022).

² The water–health nexus was highlighted at the UN 2023 Water Conference, with access to drinking water, sanitation, and hygiene services (WASH) as an essential for positive health outcomes and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

³ Agreed language taken from resolutions WHA75.19, WHA74.4, WHA74.5, WHA74.15, WHA74.16.

Recalling the adoption by the fifth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly resolution 5/7 on the Sound management of chemicals and waste which requested the Executive Director, subject to availability of resources, in cooperation with the World Health Organization, to update the report entitled State of the Science of Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals 2012 and to present a full range of options for addressing asbestos contaminants in products and the environment;

Reaffirming the importance of the Rio Principles in addressing the sound management of chemicals for health;

Recognizing the importance of science and risk-based assessments to inform the development of policies and strategies concerning public health issues;

Convinced that the availability of policy-relevant scientific evidence and findable, accessible, interoperable and reusable (FAIR) data on the impacts of and interactions between chemicals, waste and pollution could help countries design effective public health policies, as well as better abide by their international obligations, and that it could further intergovernmental bodies, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders in their work,

1. CALLS UPON Member States,¹ taking into account national contexts and legislation:
 - (1) to strengthen implementation of the WHO Global Strategy on Health, Environment and Climate and the WHO Road Map to enhance the engagement of the health sector in the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management towards the 2020 goal and beyond, taking a health-in-all policies approach;
 - (2) to support WHO in scaling up work on plastics and health to enable better information of the potential human health impacts associated with plastic, including plastic pollution, with the aim of strengthening the public health aspects, including under the work of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC) to develop an international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution;
 - (3) to encourage the health sector to strengthen partnerships and collaborative efforts to develop and update regulatory frameworks, including the harmonization of protocols for national human biomonitoring and surveillance programmes particularly for chemicals of concern such as cadmium, lead, mercury, highly hazardous pesticides and endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs);
 - (4) to further explore, recognize and act on the linkages between chemicals, waste and pollution and other health priorities at the domestic and international levels, such as maternal and child health, antimicrobial resistance, and the importance of identifying, preventing and addressing environmentally related disease in Universal Health Coverage;
 - (5) to engage in the ad hoc open-ended working group established by United Nations Environment Assembly decision 5/8 to prepare proposals for the science-policy panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and prevent pollution,

¹ And, where applicable, regional economic integration organizations.

particularly with regard to inclusion of health aspects and participation of the health sector in the eventual panel;

(6) to recognize the importance of science-based domestic regulation of highly hazardous pesticides, in efforts to reduce adverse occupational health effects, exposure of children, and the consequences of highly hazardous pesticides on human health and diseases, including to address suicide and neurological disorders;¹

2. ENCOURAGES, as articulated in resolution WHA69.4, the continued participation of the health sector, including WHO within its functions and Member States, during the negotiations for the new international instrument for the Strategic Approach and sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020 to be considered at the 5th International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM5), and invites the governing bodies of relevant multilateral agreements, other international instruments and intergovernmental bodies, such as the International Conference on Chemicals Management, the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM) Secretariat and the United Nations Environment Programme, to consider the present resolution, as appropriate and to recognize this resolution and the work of the health sector and to facilitate this engagement;

3. INVITES the governing bodies of relevant multilateral agreements, other international instruments, and intergovernmental bodies to consider the present resolution, as appropriate;

4. REQUESTS the Director General:

(1) to publish a report, incorporating science and risk based-assessments and conclusions on the human health implications of chemicals, waste and pollution as well as reporting on existing data gaps, including from a One Health approach, ensuring data disaggregation by sex, age, disability and any other relevant factor, that takes into account persistent and bio accumulative and persistent and mobile substances, as well as substances that are carcinogenic, mutagenic or reprotoxic, neurotoxic, immunotoxin or harmful to cardiovascular, respiratory and other organ systems, or endocrine disruptors;

(2) in consultation with other One Health Quadripartite members, to further develop research on the linkages among human and animal health and the environment, such as in the case of chemicals, waste and pollution;

(3) to work jointly with the United Nations Environment Programme, to update the report entitled State of the Science of Endocrine Disrupting Chemicals 2012 to be prepared prior to the sixth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly, in line with the United Nations Environment Assembly resolution 5/7;

(4) to continue to provide technical support to countries, in particular developing countries, upon request, to build capacity to conduct science-based assessments and research, including on the association of pollution from plastics, including microplastics, as well as cadmium, arsenic, lead, agrochemical pesticides, among others, with known health effects, in order to inform the development of public health policies and support the strengthening of health systems in this area;

¹ <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240026629> WHO LIVE LIFE: An implementation guide for suicide prevention in countries.

- (5) to develop an awareness-raising campaign including an online platform that could be replicated by national and local authorities, on the health impacts of chemicals, waste and pollution, including as contaminants in drinking water and food, as well as preventing suicidal deaths using highly hazardous pesticides;
- (6) to advocate for a multisectoral, multistakeholder approach to addressing pollution, including the animal and human health sectors both as a contributor to pollution as well as in its work to identify, prevent, mitigate and treat the health impacts of pollution especially at country level;
- (7) to establish organizational work and support lines in relation to the overall orientation and guidance of the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), and the intersessional work of the International Conference on Chemicals Management, building on WHO's existing relevant work, as well as the SAICM Health Sector Strategy;
- (8) to actively contribute, in accordance with its mandate, to the work of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee, that is in charge of developing a legally binding instrument on plastic pollution; and the Ad Hoc Open-Ended Working Group to establish a Science-Policy Panel to contribute further to the sound management of chemicals and waste and to prevent pollution, and to explore the full range of options for the future involvement of WHO for the consideration by the Seventy-seventh World Health Assembly through the Executive Board at its 154th session, considering its collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme and other organizations, as applicable, including within the framework of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC);
- (9) to submit, when complete, the outcome of the intersessional process to prepare recommendations regarding the Strategic Approach and sound management of chemicals and waste beyond 2020 to the Seventy-eighth World Health Assembly for consideration through the Executive Board at its 156th session, along with a report on any updates needed to the WHO Roadmap to enhance the engagement of the health sector in the new instrument;
- (10) to work including within the framework of the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC) to encourage science-based review, research and regulation of highly hazardous pesticides used in agriculture to reduce human, animal and environmental hazards;
- (11) to continue to collaborate with the Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals (IOMC) to promote broad engagement and coordination of relevant intergovernmental organizations, further strengthening international cooperation and multisectoral engagement in the sound management of chemicals and waste;
- (12) to support countries upon request, especially developing countries, to develop national, or regional, human biomonitoring programmes for chemicals of concern, through capacity-building and technology transfer on voluntary and mutually agreed terms and in line with international obligations, aiming at helping to identify potential risks in the territories regarding population groups; to collect data to support the development of public policies; as well as to support the improvement of national health systems;

(13) to report on the implementation of this resolution to the Seventy-seventh World Health Assembly in 2024 through the Executive Board at its 154th session, the Seventy-eighth World Health Assembly in 2025 through the Executive Board at its 156th session and submit progress reports to the Health Assembly in 2027 and 2029.

Ninth plenary meeting, 30 May 2023
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