

DOCTORS WARN OF CLIMATE FAILURE

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According to 18 of the world's professional medical organizations, failure to agree on a new UN climate deal in December will bring a global health catastrophe.

Writing in *The Lancet* and the *British Medical Journal*, the organizations urged doctors to "take a lead" on the climate issue.

The BBC reports that in a separate editorial, the journals say people in poor tropical nations will suffer the worse impacts, arguing that curbing climate change would have other benefits such as more health diets and cleaner air.

Referring to the upcoming Copenhagen climate summit, the report notes that preparatory talks have been plaque by "lack of agreement on how much to cut greenhouse gas emissions and how to finance climate protection for the poorest countries".

"There is real danger that politicians will be indecisive, especially in such turbulent economic times as these" according to a letter signed by leaders of the 18 colleges of medicine and other medicinal disciplines around the world. The leaders say should the response of the politicians be weak, and then the results for international health could be catastrophic.

Further research:

Earlier this year, *The Lancet*, together with the University College London, Published a major review about the health impacts of climate change.

Some of the heading findings were that rising temperatures are likely to increase transmission of many infectious diseases, reduce supplies of food and clean water in developing countries, and raise the number of people dying from heat – related conditions in temperate regions.

The main conclusion was that in a world likely to have three billion new inhabitants by the second half of this century: "Effects of climate change will affect most populations in the next decade and the lives and well being of billions of people at increased risk".

In *Technologies For Adaptation To Climate Change*, a publication of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the chapter on *Public Health and Climate Change*, states that warmer climate can create conditions for the spread of new vectors such as those for malaria, dengue, tick borne encephalitis and lyme diseases.

Higher temperatures can also shorten the development time of pathogens, while drought causes less water for hygiene and reduce food supply causing malnutrition, with forest trees reducing air quality. Furthermore, heat can cause heatstroke and increases in mortality from cardiovascular and respiratory diseases.

Another effect is that floods, landslides and windstorms can cause deaths and injuries, disruption to water supply and sanitation systems and health care infrastructure, post traumatic stress disorders and new breeding sites for mosquitoes.

However, climate change may in some cases bring about health improvements, for instance, if they result in a less hospitable environment for specific diseases, vectors and pathogens, the publication asserts.

In the case of cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, higher temperature might cause small increase in morbidity in tropical countries but reduce the number of deaths in temperate regions.

The publication recommends that to cope with higher temperatures, for example individuals will need information on appropriate responses, including higher intake of fluids.

And at the community level, local authorities can provide cool centers which vulnerable people can resort to on particular hot days.

At the national level, governments can in the short term improve weather forecasting and in the longer term, introduce regulations to ensure that climate change projections can take into account when designing new buildings.

Overwhelming evidence continues to point to the fact that climate change is fast at work, not to talk of the devastating effects.

And as the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) keeps stating, if anticipated climate change is to remain in order of 2 to 3 degrees centigrades over the next century, the world's carbon dioxide (CO₂) have to peak within the next 10 – 15 years, and ultimately be reduced to approximately 50 percent of their present level by the middle of the century.

The panel, states further that this would be possible, provided that serious action is taken now, and among other recommended solutions calls for research and demonstration together with market incentives, and policy measures with focus on initiatives that can promote the development towards CO₂ reductions.

It is within this context that the upcoming Copenhagen climate summit becomes very crucial in the world's quest to replace the Kyoto Protocol which expires at the end of 2012, with a new agreement that will be legally binding on all nations, to rally them into action and with renewed commitment to continue with the quest aimed at combating climate change to make the world a safe place to live.