

Dear COP29 President and global leadership,

As a representative of child health professionals, we are writing to emphasise the critical need to prioritise child health at every COP meeting. Last year, we urged the COP28 presidency to place child health at the forefront of climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts, especially during Health Day. We would like to remind you that over 99% of children worldwide face health risks due to climate change and the urgency for immediate, global action is only growing.

We are encouraged by the recognition from world leaders of the intersection between climate and health, especially as COP29 hosts its second ever Health Day. Additionally, the side event by the WHO and UNICEF on the Health Argument for Climate Action with a focus on maternal, newborn, child, and adolescent health is a welcome step. However, a single side event is insufficient. **We strongly advocate for a continued, standing commitment to discuss child health as a core agenda item at every COP meeting, reinforcing the importance of child health in every climate conversation.**

Climate change drives disease burdens and poses a serious threat to child health. Children are highly vulnerable to climate-related stressors including drought, extreme weather, air pollution, and food and water insecurity. Despite this dire reality, children's specific health needs remain underrepresented in climate action discussions.

Air pollution is the single greatest environmental threat to public health, with detrimental actions across all body systems, and throughout the life course. Children are particularly vulnerable to these detrimental effects due to their higher rates of breathing and developing respiratory system. In 2021, more than 700,000 deaths of children under the age of five were linked to air pollution, accounting for 15% of all deaths in this age group. Globally, more than 90% of children are exposed to levels of fine particulate matter (PM2.5) that exceed WHO's Global Air Quality Guidelines. Air pollution is driven in large part by fossil fuel combustion, therefore phasing out fossil fuels is not only critical for climate change mitigation but also for unlocking the co-benefit of clean air—a fundamental element for optimal child health.

Climate change also exacerbates food insecurity, which severely impacts breastfeeding, nutrition and maternal and child health. Pregnant women and children are particularly susceptible to climate-mediated challenges including malnutrition, lack of clean water, and inadequate healthcare access. Displacement due to climate-induced disasters such as floods and storms amplifies these risks, leaving millions of children vulnerable to disruptions in health services and education.

Only 2.4% of climate finance currently incorporates child responsive activities, highlighting the critical need for targeted investments to protect child health in the face of climate change. We strongly urge world leaders and their representatives to prioritise child health in their climate action commitments, particularly through policies and financing that address these urgent health risks.

We call on world leaders, both now and in the future, to make child health a central pillar of climate mitigation and adaptation efforts, building a global commitment to a healthier world for children.

Sincerely,

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (UK)

[The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health](#) (RCPCH) is responsible for training and examining paediatricians, setting professional standards and informing research and policy. RCPCH ('the College') has over 22,000 members in the UK and internationally. We work to transform child health through knowledge, research and expertise, to improve the health and wellbeing of infants, children and young people across the world.

This letter is supported by:

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