

Dear COP28 President and Health Team,

As a membership organisation representing child health professionals, we are pleased to see that world leaders have recognised the critical intersection between climate and health, and we welcome the first ever COP Health Day taking place at COP28. However, we would like to call on the leaders of every country and their representatives to **specifically prioritise child health within climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts** to protect current and future generations of children.

While the COP28 Climate and Health Declaration highlights the increasingly evident link between climate change and health, the language and commitments focus mostly on the adaptation of health systems to climate change. We support messaging around the health sector's adaptation to climate change but strongly advocate for **more emphasis on climate mitigation, particularly addressing the primary driver of climate change—fossil fuels**. Fossil fuels not only accelerate climate change but also exacerbate air pollution, a major public health and child health issue.

We urge world leaders to commit to an accelerated, just and equitable phase-out of fossil fuels while investing in renewable energy transition. This is not only critical for climate change mitigation but also for unlocking co-benefits including **clean air—a fundamental element for optimal child health**. Globally, more than 90% of children are exposed to ambient fine particulate matter (PM2.5) levels above the World Health Organisation's Global Air Quality Guidelines. Air pollution is the single greatest environmental threat to public health, contributing to cancer, asthma, cardiovascular disease.

The urgency of immediate action is also underscored by the alarming fact that over **99% of children worldwide face health risks due to climate change**, lacking access to essential determinants of health including clean air, safe water, sanitation, affordable and nutritious food, and shelter. We firmly believe that prioritising mitigation efforts will provide the clean air, water, and environment that are foundational to good health and wellbeing for children.

Children are disproportionately vulnerable to poor air quality as they breathe faster and inhale a higher proportion of airborne toxicants relative to their weight. Furthermore, exposure to air pollutants during pregnancy and early childhood can have irreversible effects on organ development, potentially leading to respiratory and other lifelong health conditions in adulthood. Many studies attest to the clear links between exposure to air pollution and growth and development issues, reinforcing the importance of placing air pollution firmly on the COP28 agenda.

Urgent policy action is needed to meet the World Health Organisation's Global Air Quality Guidelines as soon as possible, with a focus on the most affected communities. **Better clean air will improve public health and population resilience to respiratory infections, which continue to be a major killer of young children.**

To address these concerns comprehensively, **we urge world leaders to place child health at the forefront on Health Day at COP28. By doing so, we can galvanise global efforts toward a healthier and more sustainable future for children and young people worldwide.**

Sincerely,

The Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health

The [Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health](https://www.rcpch.ac.uk) (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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